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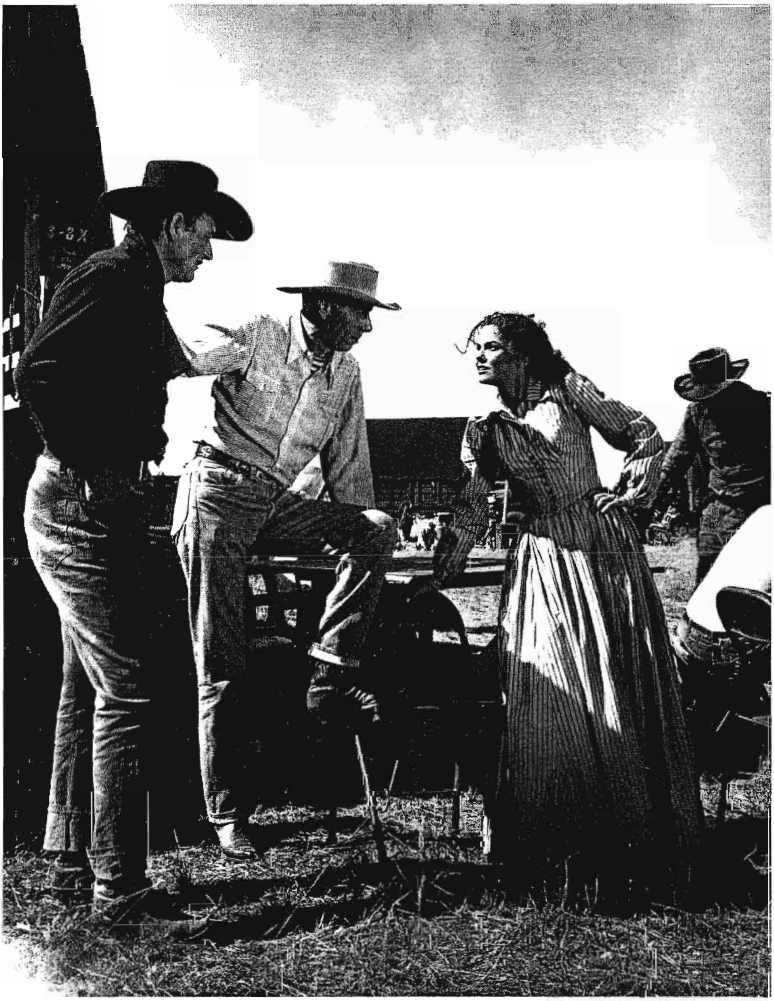

John Wayne, Howard Hawks, Joanne Dru on the set of *Red River*. Hawks later gave the belt he is wearing to Wayne, who wore it in other films (see p. 62)

BFI FILM CLASSICS

RED RIVER

Suzanne Liandrat-Guigues

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in memory of my father

INTRODUCTION

Jacques Rivette, in the May 1953 issue of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, hailed the 'genius of Howard Hawks', raising him to the rank of auteur: 'Evidence is Hawks' mark of genius; *Monkey Business* is an inspired film and makes its impression by its very evidence.' Although this celebrated remark is applied to one of the director's well-known comedies, it nevertheless amounts to a rather obscure definition, the juxtaposition of 'evidence' and 'genius' seemingly reluctant to reveal its secret. Well-turned phrases and irrefutable statements of opinion form the cornerstones of Rivette's critical method, a style which is recognisable among the adepts of 'auteur politics', and which defined the choices and assessments of the editors of the Paris-based journal during this period. And one of the mainstays of this brand of politics was Howard Hawks. Thus Maurice Shérer (alias Eric Rohmer) closed an article dated December 1953 with one of those statements which support any analysis and with which the editors of the famous 'Cahiers jaunes' were to make a name for themselves: 'I don't think that anyone can really love films without loving those of Howard Hawks.'[1] This sentence sheds some light on the meaning of auteur politics. The article, prompted by the release of Howard Hawks' second Western, *The Big Sky*, amounts to an evaluation of Hawks' films as a whole and coincides with the birth of the term 'auteur', where it is the body of an auteur's works which is taken as yardstick. The map of film history is thus retraced to include the 'Hitchcocko-Hawksian' lineage, which contributes to displacing the relationship that auteur cinema (which is nonetheless American cinema) bears to the notion of Hollywood classicism. The common denominator of an auteur's various films, their defining characteristic, being their *mise en scène*, rather than the particular subjects they deal with.

André Bazin, however, while not unaware of the merits of the critical position taken by the 'young Turks' of the *Cahiers*, underlined its limitations. Like them he valued the refusal to reduce cinema to what it expresses, in other words to its content, message or plot. He explained that 'if they value *mise en scène* so highly it is because they see in it, to a large extent, the very subject-matter of the film, an arrangement of beings and things which has a meaning of its own'.[2] On the other hand he warned against what he called the 'aesthetic cult of the personality', which has a tendency to make people defend any old film, however weak,

as long as its maker is a '*Cahiers*-auteur'; this amounts to a principle of artistic infallibility. 'Basically', Bazin wrote, 'auteur politics consists of selecting the personal factor as point of reference in the process of artistic creation and then of postulating both its permanence and even its development from one work to the next.'[3] And since this interpretative grid, placed over the work, amounts to 'an aesthetic portrait of the film-maker', auteur politics can be seen to rest on a limited appreciation of the films. 'Thus one finds a western by Anthony Mann (and God knows I love Anthony Mann westerns!) discussed as though it were not first and foremost a western', lamented Bazin, who for his part was unable to conceive of abandoning the notion of genre.

'Howard Hawks should no doubt be credited', he wrote,

> with having proved, when the vogue for the super-western was at its height, that it was still possible to make real westerns using the old spectacular dramatic themes, without attempting to distract the viewer's attention with some social thesis or whatever its formal equivalent might be. *Red River* (1948) and *The Big Sky* (1952) are masterful westerns with nothing baroque or decadent about them.[4]

This tribute to two of Hawks' films relies on a preconceived system of classification based on a historical perspective. In order to consider the evolution of the Western, Bazin was induced to set up a number of categories. He contrasted the forms adopted by the genre after World War II with what he called a 'real Western'. During this period, he claimed, the relationship towards History underwent a mutation, which is why he was inclined to group together, under the rubric of the 'super-western', films where History, which had never been more than 'the backdrop of the western', 'often becomes its subject-matter', as in John Ford's *Fort Apache* (1948).

Bazin's comment, suggesting as it does the notion of a certain classicism of the genre (which is surely what the expression 'real western' denotes) and whose passing he seemed to regret, raises questions about the relations between Howard Hawks' film on the one hand and, on the other, the historical content it conveys, the genre as a whole and the director's other Westerns. In complete contrast to Bazin's view stands Robert Sklar's remark, 'no one observed ... that *Red River* is rich in social significance',[5] which features in an article whose reading of the film

makes no secret of its ideological allegiances: 'It is a film about issues of empire. It is a film about the territorial expansion of one society by the usurpation of land from others.' Douglas Pye, developing this observation, believes that Hawks' Westerns 'are centrally concerned with social questions and explore the consequences of embedding the fantasy figure of the hero in contexts of social and historical change. In a way, the question they ask is how (or whether) such a figure can enter history.'[6] This analysis, which applies particularly to *Red River*, rejects the definition of the 'real western' as conceived by André Bazin.

1

A HOWARD HAWKS WESTERN

Howard Winchester Hawks (1896–1977), following studies at Cornell which had earned him a degree in industrial mechanical engineering, left for Hollywood in the summer of 1917 where he took a job as property man with Famous Players-Lasky. A fan of racing-cars, horses and planes, he joined the US Air Force in autumn 1917. He was demobilised in 1919. From 1923, with the support of Jesse L. Lasky, he started work in the story department of the future Paramount, contributing to the writing of around forty films. In 1926 he signed a contract as director with William Fox and directed his first film, *The Road to Glory*, which has not survived. This was also the period where he and John Ford were experimenting with anamorphic photography. An eclectic film-maker, he flirted with the most diverse of genres and, as has often been pointed out, produced in each one if not a masterpiece, then at least a great film. To cite just a few well-known examples: detective films such as *Scarface* (1932) or *The Big Sleep* (1946); comedies such as *Monkey Business* (1952) or *Bringing Up Baby* (1938); adventure films such as *Only Angels Have Wings* (1939) or *Hatari!* (1962); war films such as *Today We Live* (1933) or *Sergeant York* (1941); *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955), a film set in antiquity; and sporting films such as *Man's Favourite Sport* (1964).

Looking at his filmography, it is surprising to note that Howard Hawks was not a Western specialist. In fact it seems almost incredible that *Red River* came so late in his career. 'After two decades of directing and nearly thirty films, this was his first Western.'[7] Hawks himself said that he only directed five Westerns (or six, he adds, if you count *Hatari!*). Having said that, he fails to mention either *Barbary Coast* (1935) or *Viva Villa* (1934), where he was ousted after the on-location sequences in Mexico, to be replaced by Jack Conway, or *The Outlaw* (1940), the filming of which he abandoned after ten days to direct *Sergeant York*, offering Howard Hughes the job of finishing the production.[8]

Even so, the name of Howard Hawks, together with that of John Ford, immediately springs to mind when discussing truly excellent Westerns. This reputation is no doubt due to *Red River* as much as to *Rio Bravo* (1959), which some people consider to be his masterpiece. In his interviews with Joseph McBride, Hawks, comparing himself with Ford,

made the following admission: 'I don't think I made better westerns. I don't think *Red River* is better than his westerns.'[9] Should one draw from this retrospective view the conclusion that Hawks considers *Red River* the only one of his films worthy of comparison with Ford's Westerns? Is it a way of remembering that Ford came to watch the filming and of thanking the friend who gave him a hand with the editing? Whatever the truth, it is ultimately a great compliment to *Red River* as well as an indirect way of showing, in pure Hawksian style, the importance he attached to the film.

A 'real western'

Hawks' first two Westerns, *Red River* and *The Big Sky*, are generally held to be more firmly rooted in history than his last three, *Rio Bravo, El Dorado* (1967) and *Rio Lobo* (1970). This claim however rests on a deceptive appearance which Hawks had been at pains to put straight. Although, as the film-maker reminded us, the creation of the Chisholm Trail (*Red River*) and the exploration of the Missouri for the fur-trade (*The Big Sky*) are extremely well-known episodes in the history of the United States, 'the story of a sheriff 's struggle to keep law and order in a town also belongs to that history'.[10] So much so that a film like *El Dorado* is 'based on facts and legends that are not so well known in the schoolbooks, but very famous among those who know the West well'. This comment on the director's part tends to underline the films' common historical source despite their differences. Hawks continued his analysis by setting up a unique distinction. According to him, all Westerns fall into one of two types:

> One is the history of the beginning of the West, the story of the pioneers, which was the story of *Red River*. Then there's the phase where law and order comes. You've got a sheriff – sometimes you had a bad sheriff; sometimes you had a good one. There are only a few forms.[11]

This division between the presence and absence of law is confirmed within the five Westerns directed by Hawks. The two films released in 1948 and 1952 belong to the first type whereas the last three are illustrations of the second. In *Red River* it is clear that whatever the crimes committed during the course of the adventure, no sheriff or man

of law ever intervenes to establish a notion of culpability or to pass judgement. The loneliness of the individual who plays the leading role of Tom Dunson (John Wayne) therefore arises from the fact that he is accountable to no one for a large part of his existence. If anything changes at the end of the film it is the implicit appearance of law through the organisation of a group which historically is not yet a society, but which is beginning to develop the idea of a distinction between what is and is not permitted. It is remarkable that the formation of this law should appear, in the logic of this film, after the fracture which the American Civil War constituted. Even though this war is only alluded to in a conversation and does not appear to affect the members of the community, with the exception of the young Matthew Garth (Montgomery Clift), the men's new relations with each other seem to emerge as a result of it. The violence of this armed conflict has banished the violence of the first pioneers and engendered new forms of social success.

A Tale of the Far West

Having himself started out as a script-writer, Hawks always attached great interest to this stage of his films' conception and frequently took an active role in it. Over the course of his career he surrounded himself with prestigious writers such as Faulkner and Hemingway or personalities like Jules Furthman (who wrote *Rio Bravo*) and Ben Hecht. For *Red River* he worked with Charles Schnee[12] on a new version of the screenplay which Borden Chase[13] had adapted from his own novel entitled *The Chisholm Trail*. '*The Chisholm Trail* was serialised in *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1946, but when it was published as a hardback it was inappropriately retitled *Blazing Guns on the Chisholm Trail* (1947), which made it sound like a hackneyed formula western.'[14] The film departs from Chase's story even though most of the dialogue is taken directly from it. There are three principal transformations. At the beginning of the film Hawks invents the existence of a fiancée, Fen (Colleen Gray), one of the people travelling with Dunson in the convoy of pioneer wagons bound for California. Secondly, the relationship with Tess Millay (Joanne Dru) is modified by the suppression of previous events, principally an episode where Tess and Matthew Garth had met in Memphis. Lastly, the ending of the film differs completely from that of the novel. Tom Dunson is not mortally

wounded, nor is he taken back to Texas by Tess and Matt to die there. A large number of critics deplored the lack of plausibility of this new ending and criticised Tess's character as unconvincing. 'What is amazing is that the film retains so much power despite the weak ending.'[15] This simple statement says more about Hawks' finale than any other analysis and suggests that the director made a deliberate decision to make fun of the conventions of narrative verisimilitude against which people would try to measure it. These various rearrangements were met with considerable discontent on the part of Borden Chase, however. Hawks had severe words to say concerning the collaboration with Chase, whose name would later be associated with that of Anthony Mann: 'Borden Chase wasn't content with writing a story; he wanted to tell you how to do it. I wouldn't say that he was the greatest judge of how to do it.'[16]

Apart from the story by Borden Chase mentioned in the credits, the film draws on another source, mentioned in one of the first intertitles, namely the literature of the American Far West. Starting with what one might call 'the raw materials of Texas', then, Hawks elaborates a new tale of the old days of cowboys and the history of cattle. Michel Pérez emphasises this when he says that 'we should not refer to European values' when considering the work of Hawks, but rather to 'a literary tradition scarcely a century old in which the names of Mark Twain and Stephen Crane, but especially those of O. Henry and Bret Harte take pride of place'.[17] To this one would have to add the names of many other writers who chose the West as setting for their stories.[18]

The novelist O. Henry (real name William Sidney Porter, 1862–1910) lived in the Far West, a place which fascinated him and inspired his books *The Heart of the West* (1907) and *Four Million* (1906). For him it contained a mixture of strangeness, tenderness and nostalgia where hints of cruelty and bitterness also surface. He states that 'in Texas conversation is rarely unbroken. You can insert a kilometer, a meal and an assassination between two speeches without losing the thread of the argument'. This is reminiscent of the characteristic structure of an Andy Adams[19] story such as 'Why The Chisholm Trail Forks'; here one Stubb recounts horrifying stories to a 'tenderfoot' who wants to know why the Chisholm Trail forks just north of the Cimarron River, only to form a single path seven miles later where it rejoins the old track. The real explanation is that this

Signs of history and the West: the opening intertitle, campfire tales, the railroad at Abilene

alternative route provides a better terrain for cattle to pass, but Stubb launches into a long story – interspersed with pauses necessitated by the cowboy's work – about a quarrel leading to a bloody gunfight which results in roadside tombs springing up. Slow pacing, digression and comic exaggeration are essential to the storytelling, resulting in a particular kind of narrative which may well have been an inspiration to Hawks. The 'obsession with continuity' pointed out by Jacques Rivette, cannot be reduced to the themes of the path and of cattle-transport.[20] One can sense, beneath the formal necessity of linearity, a style which is associated first with forking complexity before things can resume their peaceful course. This structure is at work in *Red River* as it is in most of Hawks' stories where professional commitment forms the core theme and onto which anecdotes, witticisms and variations, always directed with great attention to detail, are grafted. It is these profoundly human details, combined with an overbearing compulsion or an almost obsessive determination, which constitute the unique character of a Hawks film.

Through the evocation of those 'Early Tales of Texas' positioned at the film's opening (which echo J. Frank Dobie's very real *Tales of the Old Texas*)[21] together with the campfire talks, during the course of which the cowboys in *Red River* tell their version of dramatic stampedes and other trail incidents, Hawks alludes to the culture of the West. However, in the same way as Hawks can be seen to displace the title of Borden Chase's original story, *The Chisholm Trail*, transforming it into *Red River*, the film-maker also metamorphoses this 'Texan raw material'. There is a disparity at the heart of this transformation as well as in the modification of the date of the opening of the Chisholm Trail, which is changed from 1867 (the historical date) to 1865 on the final intertitle of the film. Respect for the historical facts is certainly not the film-maker's primary concern, then, despite the fact that he had amassed a great deal of information about the history of the West and knew the subject well.

The Chisholm Trail

The historical context on which *Red River* draws is easy to identify. It is bounded by the film's first intertitle, which sets the start of the action in 1851, and the last one, where the name of the Chisholm Trail and the date 1865 appear. This is a different procedure from that employed in *The Big*

Sky where Hawks elaborates on the story of Lewis and Clark and in so doing distances himself from it. Here he bases himself on a number of historical facts.

The American Civil War brought about the ruin of the Texan livestock-owners, forcing them to go and sell their cattle away from the South, which was the domain of the 'carpetbaggers'. This led to the foundation of the Chisholm Trail and the prosperity of the town of Abilene. Jean-Louis Rieupeyrout, like many other historians, has shown how from 1850–6 the cattle trade evolved and then forced Texan cattle-breeders to sell their cattle in the North and East where prices were higher. The trace of such precursors is visible in the film: Dunson plans to drive his herd towards the Missouri, a principal meeting-point for large cattle convoys (via the Sedalia Trail) along with the Colorado (via the Goodnight and Loving Trail) in the days before the foundation of Abilene (terminus of the Chisholm Trail), which from 1867 became the main cattle town. Richard King's ranch, one of the most successful, covered almost the whole of Santa Gertrudis County, on the Nueces River. In 1865 it measured 120,000 hectares.

> The particular case of Richard King should not give rise to any illusions about the cattle business in Texas at this time. Enormous wealth had been accumulated, with the number of livestock rising to somewhere around three and a half million head of cattle (ten times as many as in 1850), but this wealth contained its own undoing since the price per head was constantly falling.[22]

In *The Log of a Cowboy* Andy Adams recounted his memories of being a cowboy in Texas in the 1880s. He mentioned driving the herds northwards, where crossing the Red River plays a prominent part. This important stage would become known a few years later as 'Doan's Crossing on Red River' (on the trail to Dodge City). The reputation of this crossing-point was due as much to the majesty of the 'merciless' river whose high red banks colour the water as it is to its torrents which were capable of swelling rapidly and drowning many a 'trail man'. On reaching the river it was customary to take the herd across without waiting and without either resting or changing horses, in accordance with the principle 'that a river which was fordable at night was the reverse by daybreak'.[23] Hawks makes this detail his own, but modifies its meaning

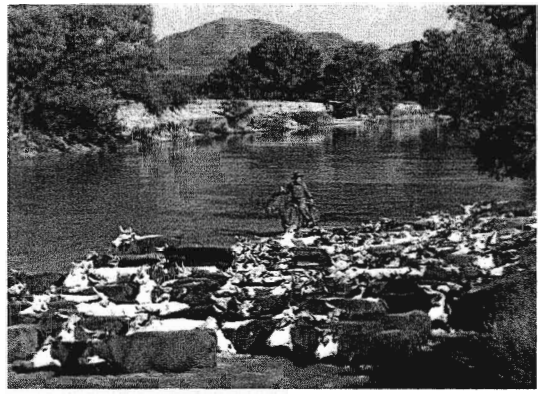
by transforming it into a sign of Dunson's increasingly ruthless authority. His haste to put the Red River behind him can be interpreted as proof that he cares little about the men's weariness and he refuses to allow them any rest before the difficult crossing.

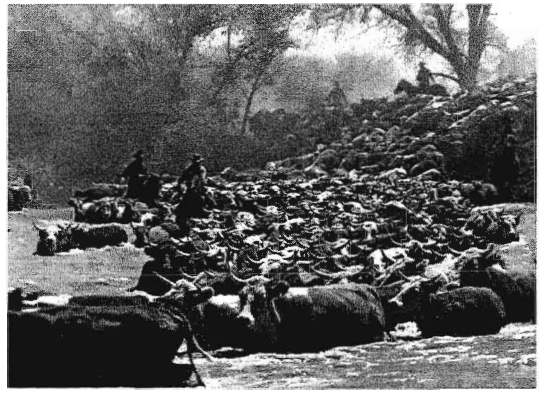
At the beginning of the 19th century the Red River became the subject of discussions between the United States and the Spanish; the latter claimed it as a frontier, while the State of Louisiana staked claims to extend its territory right up to the Rio Grande.[24] The northern limit of the new State of Texas followed the course of the Sabine River and then the Red River. Traces of this historical dispute remain in conversations between Dunson and the Mexicans.

The importance of the Red River is therefore partly legendary. It is reflected in the presence of this river's name in the titles of several films made by the Republic firm (*Red River Valley*, 1936, with Gene Autry and again in 1941, with Roy Rogers; *Red River Range*, 1938, with John Wayne; *Red River Renegades*, 1946). The name of the river can be found in some of the songs collected by Alan Lomax[25] whose titles evoke the cowboy lifestyle: 'The Old Chisholm Trail', 'The Red River Shore'. To this list must also be added 'The Dogie Lullaby' and 'Night Herding Song', tunes which aimed at calming cattle made nervous by the night, in order to avoid a stampede. The film gives an idea of this practice in the scene where the cowboy played by Harry Carey Jr moves away singing while he circles the herd to keep it calm. The song 'Red River Valley' was sufficiently famous in the 1940s that some single-reel films included an orchestral version of it with square dancers performing during the chorus.

Walter Prescott Webb, writing in 1931, remarked:

> It is estimated that two hundred and sixty thousand head of Texas cattle crossed Red River for the northern markets in 1866. The objective of most of these herds was Sedalia, Missouri, which offered rail facilities to St Louis and other cities. But disaster awaited the Texans and their herds in south-eastern Kansas, southern Missouri, and northern Arkansas, where armed mobs met the herds with all possible violence. The pretext for this opposition was that the cattle would bring the Texas fever among Northern cattle, but in some cases, at least, robbery and theft were the real motives ... the Texas drovers soon learned to avoid this region.[26]





Crossing Red River

Apart from bandits and cattle thieves, the Texan cowboy also had to contend with the Kansas farmer associations ('Jayhawkers') – 'men of the hoe' who were hostile to the southern 'horse and cow man' – as well as the Indians, who levied a *per capita* tax for the privilege of crossing their territory, but who for this reason were infinitely preferable. In the film, the cowboy with the throat wound gives a summary of similar events which had befallen the convoy with which he had been following the Missouri Trail.

Joseph G. McCoy,[27] one of the main figures associated with the trail, was a businessman from Illinois. He recorded his experiences of the period immediately preceding the regular large convoys to the North. The winter of 1865–6, he recalled, was an intense period on the Sedalia Trail bringing together all of those who had been encouraged to go into business by the success of one Tom Candy Ponting, the discoverer of a direct route to the Missouri Pacific Railroad. The Texans' determination was not rewarded in the end, however: losses were high and the animals which had to confront these obstacles were in a sorry state. Their profits went up in smoke. It was at this point that Joseph G. McCoy appeared on the scene and by creating the first ever cattle town, Abilene, a small place in the middle of Kansas, did his best to enable Texan cattle breeders and northern buyers to come together. Which explains how, one day, a man named Thompson arrived with a herd after meeting Jesse Chisholm on his way, the latter having been sent by McCoy to divert cattle convoys on the southern trails from Missouri to Abilene.

Chisholm, a mixed-race Cherokee, was no cattle man. The task set him by McCoy in the summer of 1867 consisted of opening up a route from the Red River Station. Its merit was modest since the same route had been travelled the year before by a herd coming from Texas led by Charles Goodnight, an employee of one of the biggest ranchers, John Chisum. 'This section was baptised with the name Chisholm by popular consent. Purists of the history of this trail's creation like to point out, however, that it only bore this name north of the Red River, being known in the South, between Brownsville on the Rio Bravo and the Indian territory, as *Eastern Trail* or even as the *Texas Trail*.'[28] It is possible to see McCoy in the character of the cattle buyer played by Harry Carey if only because of the mention of the State of Illinois: 'McCoy seems clearly to have been the model for Melville, who greets Matthew Garth in Abilene with the words, "Matt, I'm the Greenwood Trading Company of Illinois."'[29]

> The original Chisholm Trail was never fixed into a definite track.
>
> Its partial fluctuations indicate difficulties of all kinds which were encountered on its route. One can understand, from painstakingly detailed reports by witnesses and specialist historians, the importance of this trail and of all subsequent trails. Each one had its own early saga composed of myriad incidents, reflections of a fixed point in time which marked the birth of an Empire.[30]

The cinema in its turn took possession of this history. There is a veritable 'cattle cycle'[31] made up of films which illustrate the main stages of cattle driving and of the life of the cowboy. *The Big Land* (1957) tells the story of the setting-up of a 'cattle town'. The name of Abilene appears in several other titles (*Abilene Town*, 1946, *Gunfight in Abilene*, 1966). The various wanderings which spring from the trail have been narrated not only in classics of Western literature such as *The Log of a Cowboy* or *A Texas Cowboy* by Charles A. Siringo, but also in numerous films: *Cowboy* (1958), *The Tall Men* (1955), *Cattle Drive* (1951), *The Last Sunset* (1961), *Will Penny* (1967), *The Culpeper Cattle Co.* (1972). Nor should one forget the work of engravers and painters such as Fredric Remington or Charles M. Russell which illustrated the stampede, round up, branding and other aspects of the cowboy's work.[32]

Map of the West: Geography and Space

Movements in *Red River* imply a precise geography which is most often evoked verbally (in conversation or on the manuscript pages which recur

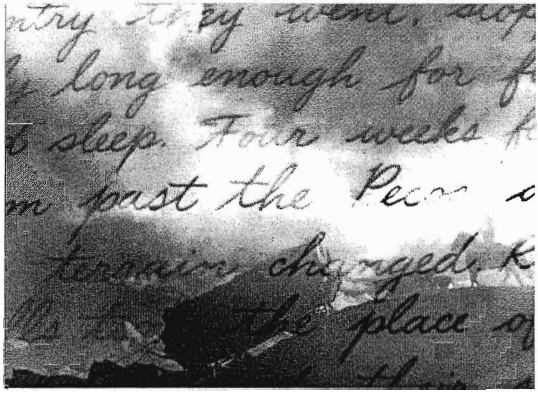
The opening title superimposed on water

regularly throughout the film). However this geography only amounts to a superficial account, either because the pages we see are turned, or because it is only partially present in the images shown. Places are actually characterised very little and Hawks does not seek to give them any consistency. The film's opening seems to set up a correspondence between geography and the convoy of wagons – exemplified by the image of the couple kissing against the sky – yet in subsequent sections the representation of places loses some of its picturesque quality (which was certainly excessive in the first images). It leaves nothing behind except a functional space determined by action, which is the meaning of the dissolve sequence showing Dunson and Groot's wagon journey. The geographical variations announced in the film's intertitles are not specifically reflected in images.

More importantly, a radically different perception of space begins to emerge, little by little, which bears no relation to the realistic representation of place. Subjected to the demands first of the covered wagon convoy, then of Dunson and Groot's solitary wagon and finally of the movement of cattle, space ends up being moulded according to a particular plasticity figured primarily by the extended line. The title sequence, which is itself a procession, accomplishes this exemplary configuration in a movement which reinforces the image by superimposing the usual written credits onto running water. This recurring schematic motif is an important one as it runs throughout the film.

The journey recounted in the film is first made in one direction, towards Texas and the South where the ranch is to be established, explaining the title of the song composed by Dimitri Tiomkin, 'Settle Down'. Next, another journey takes place in the opposite direction during the movement of cattle towards the markets of the North. This inversion of the direction of travel introduces the idea of an immense to-and-fro which extends across thousands of kilometres over the years, slowed down by the weight of transport. Reduced to their essentials, these movements form an abstraction which is comparable to that of the behaviour and actions of the sheriff and his friends in *Rio Bravo*.

The role played by space in Hawks' first two Westerns has often been contrasted with the confinement within enclosed spaces in *Rio Bravo*. Such oppositions can be misleading however. A contrary view might very well point out a common geometry in these different



The opening shots and a dissolve between writing and the journey

Westerns by Hawks. The linearity evoked by the necessity of the convoy or of the trail (*Red River*), or by the journey upstream and then downstream (*The Big Sky*), finds a parallel in the comings and goings which keeping a watch on the town forces on the sheriff's men in *Rio Bravo* and then in *El Dorado*. During most of these two films, the route is tightly delimited, making the whole town into a double of the prison of which the sheriff is in charge. If old Stumpy is condemned to immobility because of his limp, his tramping about is scarcely different from Sheriff Chance's journeys (or Dude's) back and forth along the main road. The town's entire form seems to be modelled in terms of the sheriff's professional demands and obsessions. We see nothing but the double enclosure of these movements, so much so that the prison does not need to show its real prisoner since this is not its role (in fact we never witness one of those cell scenes of which the Western has traditionally made great use). The final shootout contributes visually to exploding the obsession with surveillance, people's conduct and moral obligations. The discovery of the sticks of dynamite amounts to a sleight of hand on the part of the screenplay enabling this rigidity and formal abstraction to be blown to pieces with a view to opening up a new multi-directional space.

It is certainly true that the double journey undertaken in *Red River* is of a totally different order from the comings and goings of *Rio Bravo*, but they are both subjected to comparable constraints: the men's professional activities and the moral contract (written or otherwise) which binds them together. It is remarkable that here again Hawks should have chosen to select just two actions to express the idea of obsession, engendering a visual linearity of great restraint. The first of these actions is Tom's desire to go and set up his ranch in Texas; the movement towards this land is the film's only interest. It is worth noting that during the fifteen years which it takes to set it up, the life of the ranch, complete with its (more or less stereotypical) events, is never translated into images even though the Western genre possesses a whole register of scenes for such episodes. The refusal to use such images (whether dramatic, anecdotal or picturesque) is accompanied by a fairly complex editing procedure which calls on a series of dissolves to resume the passage of time while at the same time wiping out the possibility of developing the everyday life of a farm. The film's second axis concerns the need to go and sell the herd in the North, brought about by the disasters ensuing from the Civil War. Here episodes multiply throughout the journey.

Their main effect is to prolong the unfolding of the journey and to introduce the idea of an obligation to pursue it come what may. Thus the whole film is caught up in the turning of this double movement like a kind of inevitable folding.

The fulfilling of the contract, at first individual, then collective, permits no exceptions. Commitment, determination and an obsession with progression are the film's key themes. The tale ends up with an explosion, almost as though it had taken over a violence borrowed from narrative constraints, and thus concludes in strange fashion this story which had been marked with mystery from the outset. The conclusion of *Red River*, it is true, does not resort to dynamite, yet this finale multiplies forms of division. Blood is spilled, the cowboys split up, Dunson is abandoned, Matt takes over the convoy, the journey forks towards Kansas. The action breaks up into mirrored facets. There is a suggestion that Dunson is getting together an armed band while Matt pursues the task at hand and reaches Abilene. This is the point at which we meet a convoy of women, one of whom is Tess. This ending has often been criticised. Robin Wood, for example, sees a weakness in the fact that Hawks, modifying Borden Chase's text, fails to allow any romantic development in the relationship with Tess, while Richard Corliss finds Hawks' modifications to Borden Chase's tale catastrophic.[33]

The end of the film amounts to an explosion of the story since one has the impression of different possible narrative frameworks, from distinct genres, crossing without ever being fully achieved. Thus the images of Tom Dunson, wounded in his leg and right hand, exhausted by sleepless nights and drink, alone, but about to form a band and return more formidable than ever, are missing. And because there is not even the slightest instance of parallel editing, the usual suspense created by showing pursuers and pursued is denied. What we have is a more cyclical time, distinct from the normal temporality of the advancing herd, a mythical time during which beings are dislocated and reassembled by virtue of this new modality of movement to-and-fro.

During the night of waiting one can see an episode of another kind of adventure movie appear. The fog-smothered vegetation seems disturbing. The slightest noise makes those watching by night jump and a sense of the fantastic comes into play. Everyone seems terrified at the prospect of Tom returning, as if he might have turned into a monster. The shadows, the night, the indistinct landscape trapped in the fog, all

Night watch

invoke the idea of ghosts and engender a fear to which some admit at that moment.

Although it is secondary, comedy still remains on the horizon, as in the meeting with the coach of prostitutes, for example, or at least as far as the cowboys' comments are concerned. This scene could have been a light-hearted sequence such as the one John Ford worked out in *Cheyenne Autumn* (1964). Nothing of the kind here. Suggestion is sufficient and such a sequence never occurs. Only one woman, Tess, emerges from this convoy of girls and she is not a prostitute. She simply astonishes us with her manners and her frankness. It is not until the duel scene that this strange dislocation intervenes. That Matt should refuse to use his gun contravenes the rules of the gunfight and turns this instant, where there is no longer any risk of death anyway, into a brawl. The final crisis-point, where the spectator 'can no longer contain the confusion of his feelings', rests on the fact that one never knows 'whether to laugh or be scared', as Jacques Rivette has noted.

From a narrative point of view, this ending is certainly problematic and criticisms of it well-founded. But is such an observation sufficient? By refusing to romanticise, this ending enters perfectly into the film's schema. It completes the overall composition by re-establishing, at the opposite end of the story, a feminine presence in counterpart to Fen, Tom Dunson's lost fiancée. In this way the film's two axes, corresponding to the two directions of the journey which make up the framework of the film, find themselves placed rigorously side by side. Of course it is true

that, by means of understatement, separating the fiancés avoids having to deal with the couple's previous relationship, but one does have to recognise that for a first meeting such an ellipse is more surprising. Still it was necessary for the separation and meeting to balance each other out perfectly to make the film's schematic composition work and also to compensate for the meeting with Tess by understating the relationship between Fen and Tom. This elliptical writing permits a certain sliding of the Fen–Tom couple towards the Tess–Matt couple as well as superimposing one on the other.

It is surprising that a story based on the perseverance, stubbornness and determination of a man like Tom Dunson should conclude with such destabilising images of power, or in other words that the obsession with continuity should be resolved in dispersal. It is *Rio Lobo*, more than *Rio Bravo* or *El Dorado*, which explains this schema by showing one last time the destructive force of individual rectitude and universal truth through the motif of the scar or wound. In Hawks' universe, men, who are often strong or courageous, devote themselves to a task which defines them and monopolises their time and energy. This line of conduct, which forces them to strive and to persevere in the name of a commitment which they have taken upon themselves, does not spare them the complications or the vicissitudes of the road. Each one in his isolation witnesses the privileged moment when the world he has imagined is dislocated and vanishes before his very eyes. These strong men enjoy the formidable privilege of making mistakes ('You was wrong, Tom' Groot repeats several times to Dunson) and thus of witnessing, while constantly persevering, the progressive dissolution of everything upon which their tenacity is based and which consequently defines them. These movements, however contradictory, lend them their grandeur. Their actions and their determination constitute the way they are now. Their commitment to this task is absolute and justifies their obsession with continuity. This world is resolutely human, without illusion and without paradox; Sisyphus is never far away. The only things which count are the work to be accomplished and the road to be travelled. And if such beings are embodied by an actor of John Wayne's stature their monumental aspect sets them in stone. Writing about John Wayne's body, Deborah Thomas notes that the key terms used to describe him are 'tall in the saddle', 'American institution', 'solitary', and 'man of action'. 'Both "tall in the saddle" and "American institution" suggest the statuesque, the

monumental',[34] she adds. This kind of doggedness, associated with a job which has to be accomplished (hunting, fishing, automobile racing, aviation or the capture of animals – Hawks' characters are never ones for indoor pursuits), accounts for the paradox of existence as presented by Hawks' cinema. Like a 'wayside standing-stone' (Victor Segalen), Tom Dunson is a witness to the road,[35] through John Wayne's body, which is used in *Red River* as never before.

2

THREE-CUSHION DIALOGUE

Actors

Montgomery Clift, a young New York theatre actor, made his cinema debut in *Red River* alongside Joanne Dru whose second film it was. She was a friend of John Ford's daughter and stepped in at the last minute for Margaret Sheridan who was pregnant. John Wayne, who was far from being a beginner, was a different proposition entirely. Hawks could scarcely avoid casting the man who in 1930 (abandoning his real name, Marion Michael Morrison) had filmed *The Big Trail*. Directed by Raoul Walsh, this film had little success and did not provide Wayne with the breakthrough he had hoped for. The actor, condemned to remain for some time on Poverty Row, appeared in the Republic series the *Three Mesquiteers* which included *Red River Range*, a film in which he had acted just before being directed by John Ford in *Stagecoach* in 1939.[36]

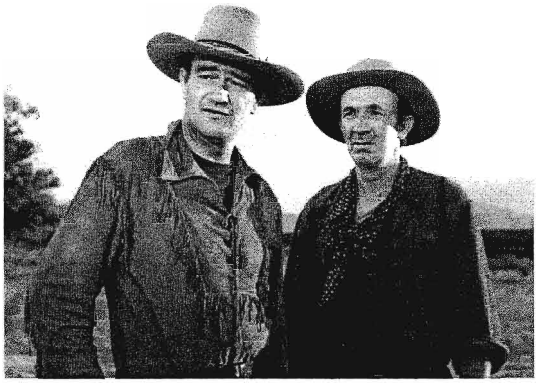
Before deciding on John Wayne, Hawks offered the script of *Red River* to Gary Cooper and also, for the role finally played by John Ireland, to Cary Grant.[37] Portraying Tom Dunson, a hardhearted man who kills with impunity, Wayne plays a bad character for the main part of the film – a fairly rare situation in the actor's career with the exception of his role in Cecil B. DeMille's *Reap the Wild Wind* (1941). The impression one retains of the character of Dunson is a composite one; whereas the film's ending and opening tend to cast him in a sympathetic light, in the heart of the film he appears as a tyrannical and violent being, prepared to resort to any extremes to accomplish his project, which is to become the owner of an immense ranch and to prosper in the face of historical setbacks. The rupture of individual identity parallels the rupture provoked by the American Civil War which is mentioned in the dialogue. Armed conflict is no less present in the film because of the changes and consequences it entailed. This rupture is expressed literally by the deterioration of the actor's body, wounded, limping, badly shaven, his face gashed ...

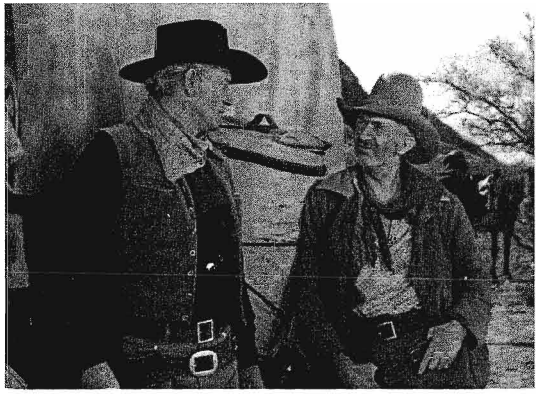
For Douglas Pye, all of the heroes imagined by Borden Chase are comparable to Dunson, especially those which appear in Anthony Mann films. Even if it is difficult to know what the real influence of *Red River* was on the Westerns which followed it, one finds increasingly a character close to Dunson: 'After *Red River*, Dunson-like heroes become more and

more common – anachronistic, morally problematic figures stranded in some sense by historical change, whose assertions of identity are increasingly undetermined.'[38] In the 1940s ambiguity in a main character was unusual indeed; it modified the traditional approach to Western heroes. The enigma which the character played by Wayne represents is best expressed by a playful exchange. Ned Groot (Walter Brennan) refuses to explain who Dunson is and what links the two by means of an enigmatic turn of phrase: 'You know, Dunson and me ...Well, it's Dunson and me.' Deborah Thomas detects this enigmatic character on the part of the hero in other characters played later by Wayne.[39] Another very interesting formulation of this is given by Gary Cooper's role in the Anthony Mann film *Man of the West* (1959), where the recurring weight of the past transforms the character's behaviour by obliging him to renew contact with his old companions, thus provoking his momentary decline. During the 1960s Sam Peckinpah, in his *Ride the High Country*, articulated an opposition between 'the old Westerner' (Joel McCrea) and 'the Oregon Kid' (Randolph Scott) who are confronted with historical change and the moral problems which this entails. Then there are the low-down, evil heroes, who in their unremitting violence most often induce laughter. But that is another story altogether.

Hawks' second discovery was linked to ageing his actors. In fact Deborah Thomas' observation about the characters played by John Wayne needs to be stood on its head. It is not enough to state, as she does, that 'Wayne's toughness is fully compatible with age, fatness, drunkenness, and physical infirmities (bad eyesight, aches and pains) as his later films make abundantly clear. Indeed, on occasion he was deliberately aged ...'.[40] Instead one needs to gauge Hawks' decision, in *Red River*, to make Wayne look older. This decision was to guide the whole unfolding of the actor's career, and give him his originality, his trademark so to speak. Hawks' idea pre-programmed most of the characters which Wayne was to play since they all take up or develop an aspect already contained (or implied) in the role of Tom Dunson. 'Wayne, the old-age actor'; the issue, as Luc Moullet notes, is crucial. In his first appearance in a Hawks film, it is precisely this ageing make-up which lends him the special power which allows us to foresee better roles to come. At thirty-nine years of age, when others were still playing young men, Wayne 'portrays an old breeder, worn-out, lined, wounded, limping, dirty and drunk, visibly suffering from kidney-pain, all of

Ageing in the film: Dunson and Groot

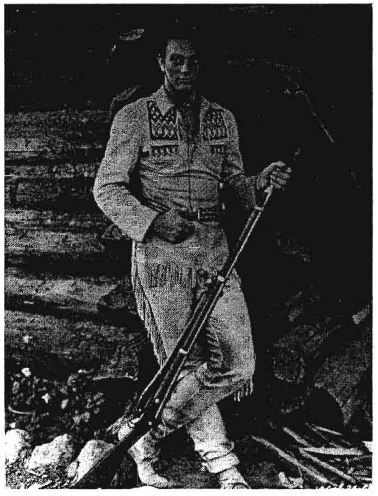




which lends him much greater stature than in his first films, such as *The Big Trail*, where the one-dimensional role of dandy, with pale face and slicked-back hair, so popular in the thirties, conveys very little.'[41] This innovation ended up by exerting a favourable influence on the actor's career, modifying it and determining the way he would play parts in the future. It constituted a distortion of Wayne's body, as imagined by Hawks, and to which John Ford was also not insensitive. At the end of filming Ford celebrated the actor's real debut with a first anniversary candle. This start hardly spared his grey hairs. Straight after *Red River*, John Ford asked Wayne to take on what was to be one of his best roles, in *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon* (1949), where he plays Nathan Brittles, a captain who has reached retirement-age.

The problem of age, together with illness, was to accompany Wayne right into his last films. He showed no hesitation in showing on-screen (in *The Shootist*, 1977) the cancer which was to kill him, playing it to the limit in his last film and thereby accomplishing Dunson's destiny beyond the limits of narrative. Walter Brennan also springs to mind in this connection. The circumstances of Walter Brennan's death are scarcely known, but the actor excelled in the role of old men, particularly as 'old timers' in *Red River* or *Rio Bravo*.

Wayne's frailty in *Red River*, his youth in *The Big Trail*, and near death in *The Shootist*



In *The Barbary Coast* (1935), Hawks gave Walter Brennan his first major role, while the actor won an Academy Award for *Come and Get it* (1936). Hawks recalls the moment when he was working out the casting for *The Barbary Coast*:

> They brought in Walter Brennan and I looked at him and laughed. I said 'Mr Brennan, did they give you some lines?'. And he said 'Yeah'. I said, 'Do you know them?'. And he said, 'With or without?'. I said, 'With or without what?'. He said, 'Teeth'. I laughed again and said 'without'. He turned around and read the lines, and I said, 'You're hired'. When we were going to do *Red River*, there was one line in the scenario, it said, 'The cook's name was Groot'. He said, 'What are we going to do?'. Didn't worry me. I said, 'Remember how we met, that "with or without teeth?"'. Well, I got an idea that you're gonna lose your teeth in a poker game with an Indian. And every night he makes you give them back'. 'Oh', he said, 'we can't do that'. I said, 'Yes, we can'.[42]

'I think Walter Brennan was the greatest example of a personality that I've ever used',[43] Hawks told Joseph McBride, 'Brennan had an amazing quality, to be able to play anything and do it right'.[44] He epitomises excellence in a supporting role and his filmography is impressive. Even today a large number of critics view him as an actor with a considerable emotional charge. 'Walter Brennan is above all a look: tall, slightly hunched, inseparable from his ridiculous headgear – or from the sailor's

Walter Brennan: with or without teeth?

cap askew on his head – he is blessed with the gift of mimicry and emits a stream of language more or less garbled depending on whether he is wearing his false teeth or not.'[45] Is the game of putting in and taking out his false teeth not a parodic transformation of the signs of old age, a burlesque counterpoint to the ageing which Wayne had to assume at Hawks' request?

Ford and Hawks

'Auteur politics' tends to contrast Ford and Hawks to the latter's advantage. The two film-makers' working methods differ, as one detail will serve to illustrate. When Ford was dissatisfied with a scene he would re-film it in long-shot whereas, in the same situation, Hawks would make sure he had it finished as swiftly as possible. One of them would stress the composition of the picture, reminding us of Serge Daney's comment that in every Ford shot there is a mysterious movement arising 'in the middle of the image' which defies the 'lazy viewer'![46] The other tended to favour speed and movement, so much so that whatever they may have borrowed from one another as friends, the original idea would be lost in each one's reconception of it.

The theme of old age, which the role of Dunson brought into Wayne's acting, would be continuously refined over a quarter of a century by both Ford and Hawks. This is why, Luc Moullet concludes, 'it would be clumsy to study Wayne in Ford and Hawks one after the other without considering their interaction'.[47] For it is obvious that, as far as Westerns are concerned, Hawks was always envious of Ford, whom he often praises: the donkey which frightens Wayne in the night-time obscurity of Hawks' *Rio Bravo* answers comically the horse which is met before the duel in *Stagecoach*. In *Rio Bravo* Wayne tries to send the card-cheating heroine away on the next stagecoach just as the gossips in *Stagecoach* do with Claire Trevor. And Wayne's past lovelife in *Rio Bravo* (identical to his in *Hatari!* and Mitchum's in *El Dorado*) – seduced by a girl who has arrived by stagecoach, a 'no good' girl – suggests that we may actually be dealing with the hero of *Stagecoach* grown old, the relationship with Claire Trevor having gone wrong. We should not forget that Hawks began his first Western, *The Outlaw*, just after *Stagecoach*, Ford's first sound Western, nor that *Hatari!* is a response to *Mogambo* (1953). In *El Dorado*, Wayne's character is called Thornton, as in Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952). In *Hatari!* he is Irish and called Sean, which was Ford's given name, while the film's heroine, like that of

Stagecoach, is called Dallas. It is as though Hawks had wanted to repay a debt to Ford, namely the borrowings from Wayne and from the Western, which was Ford's favourite genre. And in *Rio Grande* (whose main tributary, as Luc Moullet notes, is the Rio Bravo) Ford returns the compliment naming Wayne not Sergeant, but Captain York.[48] In point of fact, Wayne's first sign of decrepitude is to be found in Ford's film *They Were Expendable* (1945), where Wayne, as lieutenant, is wounded in the hand. There is talk of amputating it. Accordingly, for *Red River* Hawks offered Wayne a scene, to be played for laughs, where he was to have a finger cut off. Wayne refused, leaving only the removal of a bullet, and the original scene would not be seen until 1951, with Kirk Douglas instead of Wayne, in Hawks' second Western, *The Big Sky*.[49]

Luc Moullet's examination of the pair accords Ford the lion's share and places Hawks firmly in his debt. However one could just as easily show influences of Hawks on Ford, albeit more enigmatic in content. There is a moment in *The Searchers* (1956), for example, where the characters looking for Debbie, who has been kidnapped by Indians, find themselves lost in marshes covered by a fog which is as sudden as it is unusual. This bears a striking similarity to the passage where, during the first night in Abilene, Matt awaits Dunson's return in a landscape inexplicably covered by fog. In both cases a dramatic impasse is expressed by means of a change in climate.

Listing details in this way likens the relationship between Hawks and Ford, as seen through the Western, to a kind of private joke. This humorous feature of the directors' work opens up two avenues for analysis. In one sense such details remain invisible, locked into a relationship of playful intimacy. But in another we can see this motivation as shunning generic demands of whatever kind. Surely, however, it is simply the importance of the plot, the richness of characters and the tension of situations which power the film's unfolding, in accordance with the narrative criteria specific to the genre in question? And is this not precisely how Hawks himself presented his work towards the end of his life? 'All I'm doing is telling a story. I don't analyse or do a lot of thinking about it.'[50] This is no doubt where the feeling stems from that Hawks' films are never anything more in relation to a given genre than prototypes, to use Gérard Legrand's term.[51]

But when all is said and done, the prevailing impression to be gleaned from the accumulation of these details is that these films draw

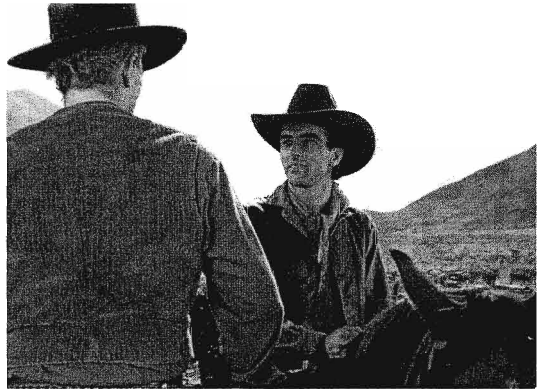
their nourishment from a composite source. Lived reality has its place here (Hawks likes to repeat to McBride that he used 'things' which had happened to people he knew) just as much as a knowledge of the history of the West. And one must include the intertextual complicity which the film-maker fosters with works other than his own (and Ford's films certainly figure highly). A particular extension of the principle of reworking can thus be seen to be at work. This is also equally present within the rest of Hawks' *œuvre*, where repetitions and their variations have often been commented on, particularly with reference to the last three Westerns. Remake, tribute or personal obsession? According to Michel Delahaye, the 'pleasure we take in these variations is as musical as is possible for an art form, apart from music itself'.[52]

It may help to define the resulting effect of this unusual combination by using a description proposed by Hawks himself of what he calls a 'three-cushion dialogue', taking billiards as a comparison. 'You hit it over here and over here and go over here for a meaning.'[53] The idea, he explains, is borrowed from Hemingway who for his part prefers the term 'oblique dialogue'. Jean-Luc Godard has pointed out that the story of Sheriff Chance in *Rio Bravo* is never related directly to the viewer.[54] He arrives and we discover things about him purely through the dialogue which, as Godard concludes, 'demonstrates how to step by walking'.[55] This effect does not simply characterise the dialogue, but also seems to be one of the principles of Hawks' *mise en scène*.

Ricochet

Hawks mentions Hemingway's name again when he says that the latter always wrote 'a certain kind of thing that he was good at',[56] and compares himself with the writer when McBride inquires whether his last three Westerns are remakes of *Rio Bravo*. Hawks retorts at this point that 'Hemingway always stole from himself',[57] which implies that Hawks did the same. Behind these comparisons it is possible to perceive a style as well as a kind of writing.

Jean-Louis Comolli has argued that it would be useful to compile a list of the repetitions in Hawks' films. He goes on to designate characters, situations and traits which function as allusions from one of the director's films to another and which have contributed to making what some have called a 'trilogy' out of these last three Westerns. These repetitions also attract their inversions and modulations. This kind of principle adds to



Ricochet of looks: Dunson, Garth, Valence ...

... Latimer, Melville

the complexity of Hawks' *œuvre*, for it is impossible not to feel at such moments that he conceives of his films self-referentially. The opening shots of *Red River*, comprising landscape, the convoy of pioneers and the couple kissing against the sky, seem like familiar images which might as well be endings from any old Western. But the inversion of position in *Red River*, which places these closing shots at the beginning of the film, opens up the possibility of a meditation on the genre itself.

> The western has never given up taking leave of itself, has never stopped embodying a nostalgia for an age of action of which it is merely the memory, while at the same time admitting this fact. Already in *Red River* we had a film trying to erase and accomplish its opening minutes simultaneously. *Rio*

> *Bravo* is another film about nostalgia kept alive in the face of despair by constant effort. *El Dorado* is the last stage of this backward glance: in the first third, open spaces, tragedy, nobility and friendship seem to unite to form an anthology of the western's bygone beauties. In the rest of the film, though, everything comes together and conspires to make it into a caricature of these very beauties, values and memories.[58]

One can never tire of enumerating the generic variables mobilised by *Red River*: pulling a Comanche arrow from a cow or from a woman's shoulder, where the woman is likened to a pretty filly; shooting a coin thrown into the air or a tin rolling on the ground to check the qualities of a gun, etc. Apart from horses and galloping, cows and cowboy's work also contribute to the pleasure to be had from the film's images. *Red River* charms lovers of the Western.

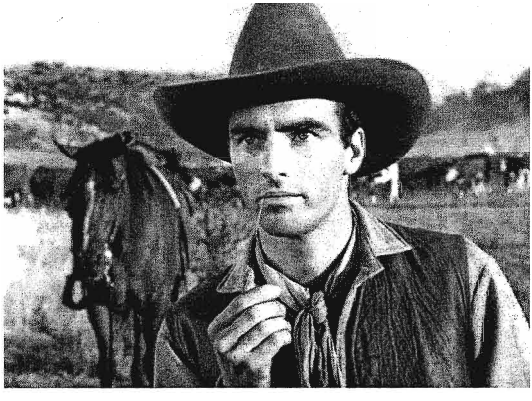
A number of the actors were drawn from the past. Some of them had been very famous at the time of silent Westerns, such as Tom Tyler who in 1939 was to play Luke Plummer in *Stagecoach*, but especially Harry Carey who created the character of Cheyenne Harry and earned the compliment 'He's human'. The latter was often directed in silent films by Ford. But as the character Melville, a cattle buyer from Abilene, he would play his last role in *Red River*. In the very same year, 1947, his son Harry Carey Jr made his debut in cinema and found himself at his father's side in the role of the cowboy trampled during the stampede. Another son, Noah Beery Jr, played one of Matt's cowboy friends. Paul Fix, Hank Worden and Chief Yowlatchie were other common faces in Westerns.

Red River generates a certain kind of complicity which is expressed fully in the acting of Montgomery Clift by his ability to imply that he understands the rules of repetition he adheres to. Even though this is his debut Clift always seems to be able to introduce a subtle counterpoint to the power and conviction developed by John Wayne when they confront each other. This is surely what the anecdote confided to McBride reveals. Wayne was afraid that it might not work out and that the 'kid' might be unable to stand up to him, so Hawks suggested filming the first scene. 'It was a scene alongside a wagon, and Wayne was talking tough; Clift had a coffee cup, and he had it up to his face all the time. He never changed expression or anything.'[59] This distant attitude created the film's reflective dimension. Being the fastest on the draw, and pitting oneself against a rival, is of course part and parcel of the genre's inherent logic. But

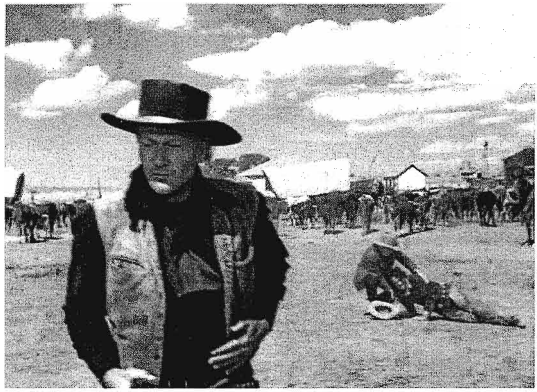
Montgomery Clift's seductive gestures and ironic smile, when confronting John Ireland (playing Cherry Valence), go much further. They take on board the affirmative qualities of repetition and reveal its power of attraction. They reflect the viewer's pleasure which they match with unconcealed complicity. The actor's performance expresses this doubling.

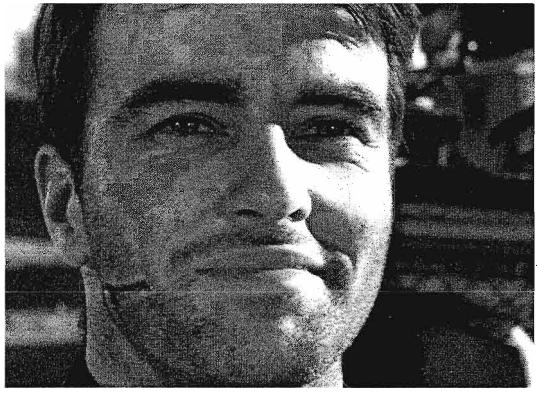
The first appearance of Montgomery Clift (in the film, in Westerns, in cinema) is accompanied by a particularly elaborate procedure. It follows the series of dissolves which, while still evoking the future ranch, facilitate the passage from adolescence to adulthood and in so doing the change of actor. We discover Monty Clift's face at the end of a reverse tracking-shot which switches to a close-up to reveal the sparkling, almost ecstatic gaze, slightly floating smile and nonchalant gesture of a person chewing a blade of grass. He already looks superbly relaxed and in control of his entry, as well as the heritage he is confronting.

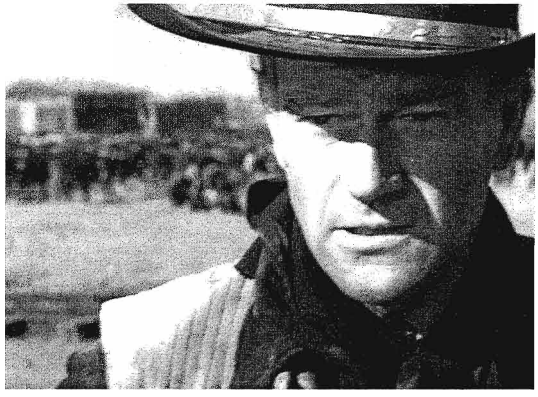
What makes this first appearance so valuable is the fact that it is simultaneously itself and more than itself. Each cowboy, Hawks tells us, wore a hat designed to make him more easily recognisable; Matt wears Hawks' own hat given to him by Gary Cooper. Wearing this piece of historic headgear, the young actor personifies the contradiction of an endeavour marked by 'belatedness' – whether because he is tackling a genre such as the Western, which is tainted with nostalgia, or because this 'belatedness' is the sign of what Dunson represents. In this respect Clift's smile and gaze give him the air of a genuine visionary, a quality which involves the personal distance necessitated by the actor's interpretation of the role.



Clift wearing the hat Gary Cooper gave to Hawks







The closing sequence

Henri Agel, in a fine article devoted to *Rio Bravo*, highlights a characteristic trait of Sheriff Chance, as portrayed by John Wayne, with an appraisal so subjective one might almost overlook it: 'I love this (non-Brechtian) distance on the part of the hero towards the things he takes on, this elegance, this breeding ... this detachment of John Wayne's ... is that of Nicomède.'[60] This reference to classical French theatre may seem surprising, but Agel reminds us that for Hawks, as in Corneille's tragedies, whether or not a man is generous, self-esteem is more important than life itself.

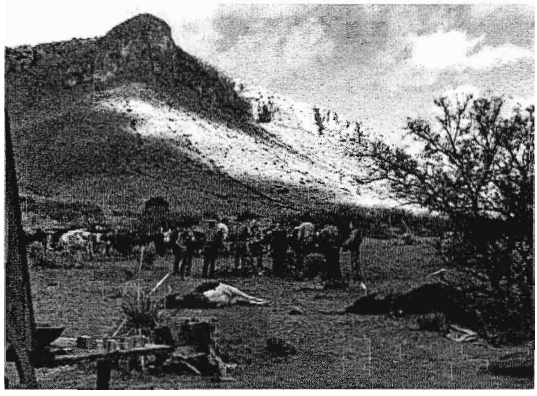
The professional commitment and distancing, which in the case of Sheriff Chance are brought together in a single individual, are divided in *Red River* between the characters of Dunson and Matt. To Tom falls the role of the person who persists in the name of a pact made with himself. This persistence no doubt blinds him, but it does confer on his undertaking the power and orderliness of a ritual. Witness the multiplication of burial scenes whose most suggestive function is to introduce something of the ceremonial into this long march. Thus the route becomes ritualised and fixed as the advance continues. As for the role of Matt, it consists in opposing a lucid side to the pole represented by Dunson, lending the former a balanced, thoughtful character endowed with clarity of mind and apparent self-sufficiency. In contrast with the child he used to be, Matt no longer needs to imitate Dunson. This is no doubt also why a radically different actor was needed from the adolescent Mickey Kuhn to play the young man he had become fifteen years later. The detachment he displays makes him into the kind of dandy that Colorado (Ricky Nelson) was to be in *Rio Bravo*, although the game of life and death by no means leaves Matt as indifferent as it does Colorado. Matt gains a certain liberty and elegance from an appeal to the reserves of humanity which exist in us all. If Dunson is entirely absorbed in the here and now of his actions, Matt seems to be gifted with the ability to see beyond this present and also to anticipate intuitively the threat of a regression towards the subhuman which lurks beneath Dunson's relentlessness. In a way one could say that he is an intercessor, in the sense of Corneille's heroes, since his acts apply simultaneously to the ordinary action taking place and to its transcendence by the agency of some hidden interior foresight, which is what lends his intervention the plenitude of an intercession. By altering the direction of the herd, he transforms Dunson's undertaking. In so doing, he both saves him and

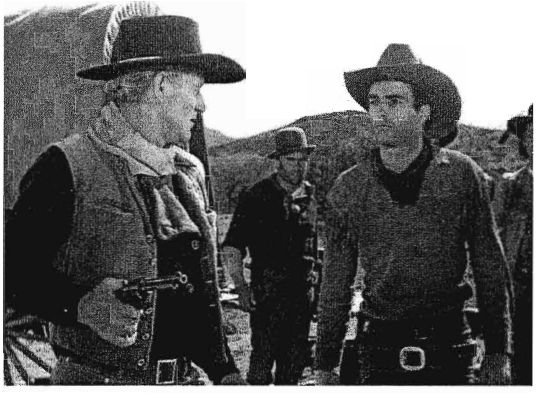
makes him grow in stature, completely fulfilling his promise, all of which ultimately justifies Dunson's obsessiveness, and balances the unequal equation. Hawks' finale did not really deserve the criticisms levelled at it, since to display their complementarity he was obliged to bring them together. To make one of them disappear would have been a normalising way (a Hollywood 'happy ending') of allowing us to think that only one was in the right. Moreover, while this may have been the lesson of history, verifiable by reference to dates and facts, this ending is a more Hawksian one. The burst of laughter which destroys the antagonism between the two men illustrates a profoundly human conception of the long road which has had to be travelled to arrive at this realisation. This road assumes the imaginary characteristics of a cemetery, as if the men had to shed the remnants of their dreams, like a couple of snakes shedding their skins.

A Cloud Passing

Hawks has stated that Ford managed to take advantage even of a poor sky, which he would continue to film and from which he would achieve fantastic effects.[61] During the preparation for a burial scene in *Red River*, Russell Harlan, the cameraman, warned Hawks that a cloud was approaching and that they needed to hurry. So was the cloud which passes during Dunson's prayer, at the burial of the cowboy trampled during the stampede (Dan – played by Harry Carey Jr), accidental or deliberate, wonders McBride? 'I waited until the cloud got near, thought of Ford, and started the scene. Then we started the burial service, and the cloud passed right over the whole scene. I told Jack, I said, "Hey, I've made one almost as good as you can do – you better go and see it."'[62] A few years later, in *The Searchers*, Ford had a shadow pass across a tomb and, during the burial service, the congregation sing 'Shall We Gather at the River' ...[63] The 'three-cushion dialogue' continues.

The fact that he may have seen it as an opportunity to pay tribute to Ford does not explain why the shadow which covers the hill at that particular moment should constitute a 'stroke of luck'[64] in Hawks' eyes. This darkening may have something to do with Ford's filming technique, as the latter declares: 'I really like shadows to be black and daylight white; but I also like to put a few shadows in the light.'[65] In Patrice Rollet's view, Ford's use of shadow never constitutes a simple threat. Its sudden appearance 'draws attention to the point at which existence fluctuates, the





The cloud passing during the burial signals Dunson's violence

single event which makes it tremble'.[66] But had Hawks picked up on Ford's own peculiar way of using shadow and made it play a similar role in his film, or was it simply a joke between friends? Whatever the truth of the matter, this observation could apply perfectly to the episode in *Red River* where the cloud passes above the burial. Indeed from this moment on Dunson's behaviour undergoes a radical change which sets this burial apart from all the others. The passing of the cloud underlines this difference. This large and gloomy veil thus brings with it an element of variation which contrasts with all the other scenes where Dunson finishes up reading a prayer over a freshly dug tomb. It announces the destruction of the little community of cowboys and the violence which will become generalised in the last part of the journey.

The detail of the cloud, then, is not just a tribute to Ford's *mise en scène*. Nor does the explanation given by Hawks in any way exclude other internal concerns which may reappear beneath the surface in any examination of aesthetics. In terms of the *mise en scène*, properly speaking, one can see the advancing cloud as creating an 'inky cloak'.[67] This dark stain dissolves on the summit of the neighbouring mountain like a fluid mass spreading out. Its blackness is indifferent to the cloudy substance which has made it appear, indeed the obscurity it brings suggests the creeping threat of blood. Sliding the colour red beneath the black of the shadow amounts to an interpretative vision to which no black-and-white film can really do justice and which cannot be attributed to an intention on the part of Hawks either. It is simply a particular way of thinking which permits one to glimpse the murky depths of this scene. However, unlike Ford's images, there is no trace of melancholy here. The outcome of Hawks' film assures a return to clarity and to the redeeming laugh.

'At the end of his life, it is his old age which will be his judge' (Jacques Rivette)

Hawks' heroes are defined by the actions they perform, while the traces of their entanglement with life accumulate on their faces, bodies and hearts. Although they appear old, John Wayne and Walter Brennan had to be made up to look this way and both altered their acting styles so that they could each portray two different stages of a single person's life. In stark contrast to this particular production decision, the part of Matt, over the years, is played by two actors (Montgomery Clift and Mickey Kuhn). And two female actors (Colleen Gray and then Joanne Dru) come

together to form a single conception of woman, simultaneously similar and different, at opposite ends of the film.

The actors' dressing-up, like that of the characters (think of Cary Grant in Hawks' comedies), is the source of certain comic effects. Here making Wayne up to look like an old man makes real the idea of permanence within impermanence. One of the film's leitmotifs is the claim that Dunson never changes his mind despite the rebuttals of existence to which his wounds bear witness. The scar also participates in claims about reason and legitimacy in *Rio Lobo*. The disfigured young Mexican woman makes her scars, for which she ends up taking her revenge, the written proof of her personal integrity. As for Groot (Walter Brennan), he sums up his friendship with Dunson in terms worthy of Montaigne and La Boétie where 'that's how it is' seems to echo 'it is written'.

It is possible therefore to see in this make-up, made necessary by the decision to have a single actor play an ageing character, an operation which aims to make manifest a system of marking drawn from one particular genre in a film which otherwise seems to contain so many. Wounds find their place here among other signs. But although, from *Scarface* to *Rio Lobo*, the scar is a recurrent feature of Hawks' cinema, its primary function here is to complete a picture (or the destiny) of the character. Through these multifarious marks – where written traces (signature and contract) and the personal constraints to which the heroes commit themselves exist in equal measure – a written body emerges. 'What are age and the passage of time', Serge Daney wondered, 'if not writing on the face? Do Howard Hawks' films actually have anything else in common except for this horror of inscription?'[68]

3

BENEATH THE CLOAK OF INK

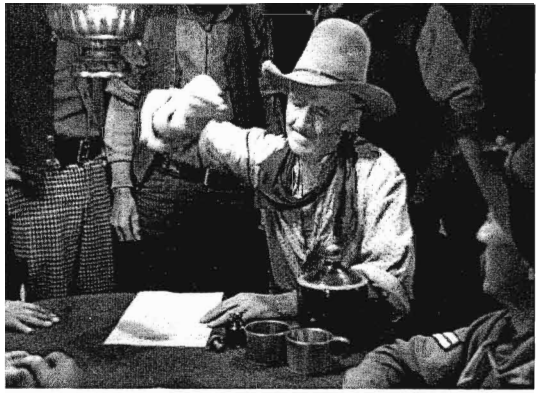
Using black-and-white allows this Western to escape the vertigo of coloured sensory impressions, giving prominence instead to the trace, the cut, the imprint, that is to say a visual inscription which partly escapes reading in the proper sense of the word thanks to its metaphoricality.

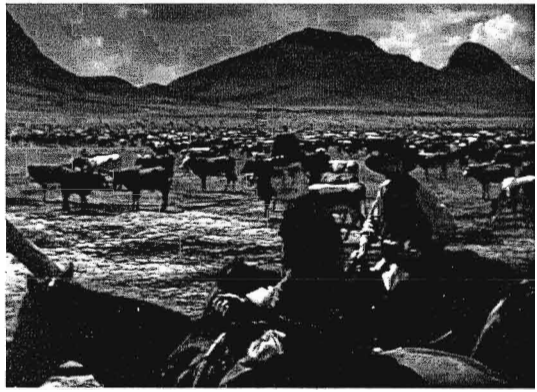
Writing

The film contains numerous shots showing pages in manuscript, which, covered as they are in fine characters with carefully formed capitals, attract one's gaze. They establish implicitly the idea of a bodily presence by means of a manual trace. They inscribe in a different way from the visible motif of the scar the possibility of an extended written body.

Right from the very first sequence, the importance of the signature is affirmed. The leader of the pioneers' convoy challenges Tom Dunson, reminding him that he has given his signature, his promise. Even though this is not the case, as Dunson's answer immediately indicates, the obligation to continue the journey, together with written commitment, is right at the heart of this first scene. Both will be repeated later in the film. In addition, however, this first scene introduces a play of lines which forms a fork in the plan. Dunson and Groot's wagon, departing from the line of covered wagons, forms a sort of inverted Y. The film's first image is not only too beautiful, or perhaps too conventional, it also imprints itself on the memory with a force proportional to the enigmatic character of this hieroglyph.

When years have passed and it is necessary to go and sell the cattle, Matt is entrusted with asking the volunteer cowboys to sign a piece of paper, or 'make their mark' on it (his expression). Old Ned Groot is the first to sign up. He only needs to place a cross opposite the list of names, but the gesture he makes describes a large circle. The over-emphasis in this well-worn gag underlines the fact that the old cowboy cannot write. And yet Ned's gesture is not exhausted by such a burlesque convention. It is linked in the imagination by a dissolve to the following scenes which depict the departure of the herd. This moment resembles a 'round up', not so much because it is precisely this stage of the cowboy's work which is being dealt with as because a play in the *mise en scène* (rather like a play



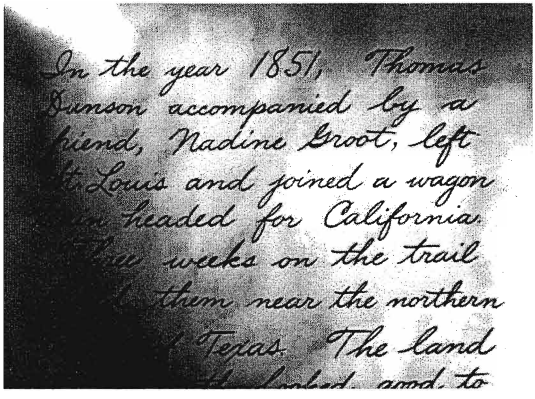


Groot signs up with a flourish, the panoramic shot, the circle of the lasso

on words) underlines it with a proliferation of circular movements: a 360 degree panoramic shot, and the arm movements of cowboys whistling and waving their hats in the air and their lassos coiled up upon themselves. Thus the signature, the cowboys' condition and the cattle's progress are intimately linked by editing and shot composition. This pact, embedded in and by the *mise en scène*, collects together the entire community, which has to walk at the same pace as the herd itself. These images begin inexorably to display the value of contracts in this film. Hawks is well and truly on the side of the spectacle, in other words, to use one of Jean-Claude Biette's oppositions, he is a film-maker who in the presence of the spectator addresses the spectator and the spectator only.[69]

Intertitles

Fourteen intertitles, written by hand, present the viewer with text to be deciphered. Apart from their abundance, which is surprising for a sound film, their function is, in fact, to question. They are pages of a putative manuscript and introduce straight away the presence of handwriting, of an unpublished text whose title *Early Tales of Texas* is not even printed; the pages are bound together in a leather cover. The first image of the film shows the manuscript being opened by turning over the cover beneath our eyes to reveal the text which makes up the film's first intertitle. Although the style is identifiably that of a diary, it is difficult to determine who the author or narrator of this journal might be both because no 'I' ever appears and because the characters are always mentioned by means


In the year 1851, Thomas
Dunson accompanied by a
friend, Nadine Groot, left
St. Louis and joined a wagon
headed for California.
weeks on the trail
them, near the northern
Texas. The land

The opening handwriting

of their (Christian) names or by third person pronouns. These intertitles play more or less the same role as a voice-over would have done; in fact Hawks had thought about adding one:

> At some point in postproduction he added a voice-over, and as late as the dialogue continuity script those lines were to be spoken by Groot. The cutting continuity script, however, dated the same time as the dialogue script, lists the shots of the *Early Tales of Texas* manuscript, the narrative backbone Hawks finally chose to use.[70]

The narrative function of these shots of manuscript is not obvious. It does not correspond to the main uses of such shots as instituted in silent cinema, where they served either to express things which the image alone could not represent or to bridge certain dramatic gaps. On the contrary the information provided by the contents of these intertitles clearly anticipates the events which are actually seen or recounted in the following episodes; there is no attempt to avoid redundancy. In the film the only elements which are not repeated systematically by visual or sonic representations are dates and the names of places which are travelled through. It is well-known that images are powerless to date events or to identify geographical locations which they tend to make more or less commonplace. A shot of a river does not become a representation of the Red River unless the latter is identified verbally. Consequently the action we see is the same as that which has already been recorded in the book, which puts the adjective 'early' in a new light. It also sets the story which is told within a literary tradition ('tales') in order to prevent the film becoming a historical document. The image is thus not given, the viewer has to move towards it in order to find the correct distance which allows this relationship to take place. What we are dealing with here then is a kind of visual writing, as an examination of these manuscript pages' aesthetic qualities will attest.

The appearance of these intertitles, during the course of the film, is accompanied by an often repetitive procedure. First there is a dissolve from the last shot (or more rarely a fade to black), the superimposition being almost always made onto the canvas (usually lighter in colour) of a covered wagon which either remains visible or then disappears completely. The dissolve is also the means whereby the intertitles are made to disappear. With three exceptions, the appearance of text is associated with

the movement of a page turning which repeats the inaugural gesture of the film. By and large we scarcely get to read this first page. Still, it is worth noting that the content of the film matches the text of the preceding intertitle, whatever the length of time separating any two successive appearances in the story. There is continuity between the texts, while linked to the act of leafing are variations in the page's composition which repeat themselves in these spread-out reworkings. The most important words remain the same, but the layout of the page or of the lines is subject to modification. There is thus textual variation through their appearance. Legibility, however, is often poor despite the magnifying-glass effect introduced by some forward tracking-shots. The page being turned maintains a shadowy zone over the writing. The shadow moves, but hinders reading, or sometimes conceals a few words or lines while enabling the lighter sections of the screen to be seen. In these shots the concentration of procedures gives an accumulation which the movement of turning pages only serves to accentuate. Transgressing the unities of space and time, through the juxtaposition of dissolves, produces the sensation of an essential connection linking the various elements.

Tracing

When it comes to thinking up a brand for the ranch, Dunson traces a double S in imitation of the two banks of a watercourse. One side of the drawing also shows the letter D (for Dunson). There is therefore an imbalance and an incompleteness in this design. Young Matt's comment that his own initial does not figure in the design underlines this incompleteness while also inaugurating the next sequence of events, for his elder lets it be known that he has not deserved it. Apart from the shape of the design itself, the most suggestive thing is the importance it accords the trace or mark.

In addition to the purely visual figure which the design of the ranch brand, in close-up, amounts to is a whole network of lines both visible and imaginary. The procession of covered wagons and the movement of the herd embody a formal network which is highly suggestive graphically and which also recalls the particular motif of the Chisholm Trail. The evocation of the American Civil War, opposing as it does north and south, draws its own imaginary line which is superimposed onto that of the east–west frontier implied by the pioneers' convoy.

The motif of the two parallel lines, closely linked to the film's graphic quality, repeats itself. The railway is one example, of course, but there are also other instances of doublings both serious and comical. On the comic side, playing with Nadine Groot's false teeth provides one of the film's most entertaining moments. The false teeth, which have been staked and then lost during the game of cards with the Indian, pass back and forth between the red and the white man. The joke consists of Walter Brennan speaking with or without his false teeth. Another doubling is the presence of Cherry Valence, the cowboy who appears as a rival to Matt, signalled by Groot when he declares 'Them two's gonna tangle for certain ...' The sentence remains incomplete partly in line with a certain tradition of waiting in the Western, but above all because Hawks displaces its usage. In the end the altercation never takes place. Instead it is doubled and reversed. First, and without a moment's hesitation, Dunson kills Matt's double, who has threatened him. Then, crossing the railway on foot, and pursuing the route he has taken through the herd, he himself confronts Matt. There has been much discussion about the plausibility of this scene, although its role is not really psychological. Its main function is to highlight the schematic nature of the setting chosen for the action. We are made aware of the relative positions of Dunson and Matt on either side of the railway tracks, while at the same time visualising the recurrent graphic elements of which the ranch brand is composed. The movement of Dunson towards Matt prefigures the tracing of a new brand in which the initial missing (in relation to the letter D) is placed on the other side of the Red River symbol.

4

VIRTUAL COLOUR

Hawks refused to use Technicolor. 'When we were making *Red River*, we discussed whether to use colour or not. At that time colour wasn't very good. It had a kind of garish look to it. I didn't like it and we were trying to get a feeling of the period, so we made *Red River* in black-and-white.'[71] The question of colour, raised no doubt by its title, seems a central one in this black-and-white film. Essentially, this question is based on the paradox that when watching a black-and-white film, colour is normally forgotten, even if it is clear that the world being represented contains colour. This failure to perceive colour actually increases the possibility of conceiving it, so long as the direction is conducive to it, that is.

The Red River

Running water is an insistent presence in Hawks' Westerns. It may well be mentioned in the title, but not necessarily in the film (in *Rio Bravo* we only glimpse a meagre stream in the final gunfight scene); in the film, but not necessarily in the title (*The Big Sky*, *El Dorado*); or even in certain characters' names (Colorado, Mississippi). In creating his Westerns, Hawks amused himself with variations (in character and situation etc.) some of which he has indicated. It is worth noting that *Rio Lobo*, unlike *Rio Bravo*, shows a deep river.

Making the Red River the film's dominant image considerably exceeds simple geographical localisation. Opposed to the frequent mention of rivers, which is attributable to historical movements, stands the visual omnipresence of the Red River. Unlike the other rivers, it generates several action scenes (the two in question being the Indian attack and then the moment when the herd crosses the river). These two rather conventional scenes find a special resonance in being associated with the idea of a 'red' river.

The two episodes devoted to the Red River correspond to moments of severe rupture in the story. The first follows the massacre of the pioneer convoy at the hands of the Indians and coincides with the attack on the lone wagon of Tom and Ned which leads to the fight in the river. There Dunson finds his fiancée's bracelet and realises that she has

been killed. The same circumstances lead to Matt meeting the two men. The second episode takes place at the point where difficulties have arisen in moving the cattle. Crossing the river is immediately followed by a build-up of tensions culminating in the stampede.

The Colour Red

The possibility of visualising red in a black-and-white film where colour is generally obscured has to be suggested by a process of insistence in order for it to acquire its own existence, albeit a virtual one. In Hawks' film, the episode where the Indian's blood runs into the waters of the Red River is insistent. Here there is a strange accumulation where the black we see invites us to imagine red instead. The massacre of the pioneer convoy is reduced to a cloud of blackish smoke visible in the distance. This black cloud stands for the blood which has flown, but which remains invisible. The idea of the cloud plays an important part here. At this point in the story Hawks refuses to show the attack on the convoy (although he does show another version of it when Tess makes her entrance – this appearance seeming to mirror the last moments of Fen's life). Only the episode where the Indian is murdered is developed visually. The *mise en scène* during the attack on the two friends emphasises invisibility, speed and unusual composition. Furthermore the fact that this scene is supposed to take place at night reinforces the impossibility of a black-and-white film showing colour, up until the point, that is, where the fight in the river takes place and the thought of red is stimulated. The river's waters, which the camera lens scans at this moment, have to seem to be coloured with blood. The red, then, as this process implies, remains virtual while still haunting the film's images.

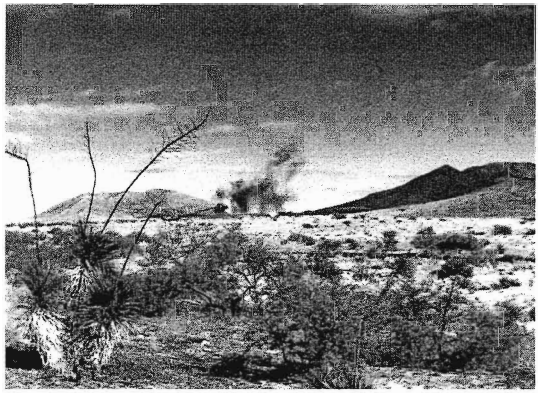
At the end of the fight Dunson finds the bracelet, which he had just given to his fiancée, on the Indian's wrist. This detail serves to lend consistency to the idea both of the colour red and of the shape of the river. Here we have a figure which mobilises various motifs: the presence of water, the sinuous line of the bracelet and of the scar, invisibility and the colour red. All of which gives meaning to the title. The name 'red river' tends to characterise this flow of water – over and above a toponymy of the West – in terms of the imaginary displacement of elements which are not directly perceptible in the film.

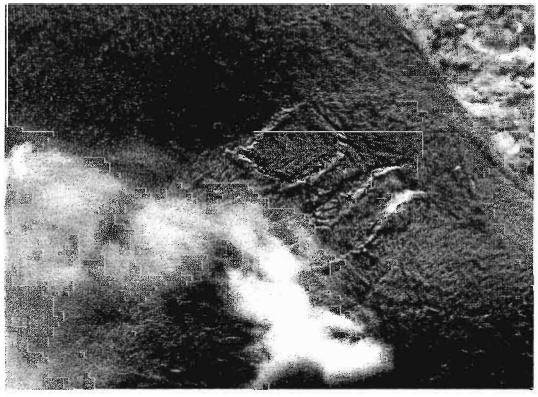
At the moment where Dunson traces the first ranch brand on the ground, the three characters have moved quite a distance from the Red

River and plunged into the South. The closest river, according to the Mexican, is the Rio Grande. And yet Dunson, drawing the brand, states 'Red River D'. The Red River therefore makes a surprise reappearance, a mental image to which the colour red belongs. One could argue that the bracelet, at the end of the fight with the Indian, becomes a symbol for an action (the death of the young girl) which has been seen neither by the viewer nor by any of the characters. The very shape of the bracelet constitutes the trace of a wound opened up by the young girl's disappearance. The scar therefore becomes simultaneously internal and external. The exchange which takes place transforms the bracelet, which is exhibited at the end of the fight, into a sign. The ranch brand also displays this movement as it itself becomes an imprint, showing how much Dunson has been impregnated by the episode in the river water. The virtual colouring of the waters is necessary so that the bracelet can be connected with the ranch brand and transformed by the imagination into a wound together with something sharp and burning which is suggested, for example, by the red-hot iron.

The idea of red therefore enables the sign to be internalised and stand for Dunson's wound, which is always ready to open up again as the episode with the panicking herd illustrates. One cowboy, who is trampled to death by the terrified animals, expresses the desire to give his wife a pair of red shoes. This restatement of the motifs (the red of the shoes and of blood which, together with the man who dies, like the young fiancée, stain the herd an imaginary red reminiscent of the river water) provokes Dunson to blind violence once again – one could say that he sees red – and he tries to punish the person responsible for the stampede. The detail of the shoes, which is taken up in *The River of No Return* (1954), gives a good measure of the differences which separate Hawks' use of images from Preminger's.

In the episode with the Mexicans, which is closely followed by an evocation of the ranch, the editing strategy is constructed as a parallel inscribed within a single action. This parallel is based on two sequences: first the murder of the Mexican and then the images of the ranch. The action is that of branding the animals. Both sequences are contained within the logic of this process of branding, which is itself split into two distinct moments: the bull is marked before the Mexicans arrive, next the cow is branded and then we see images of the ranch. Added to the sequential rhythm of these scenes is the insistence placed on the





Black cloud, bracelet, branding

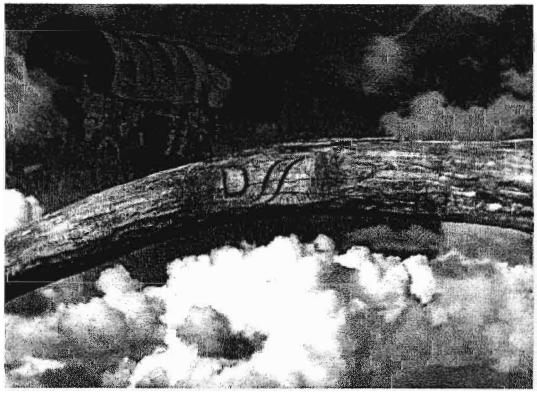
alignment of the three men or on the bodies of the two animals lying on the ground, separated by a large rock. All of this leads to a formal parallel between the murder of the Mexican and the evocation of the ranch and helps to make this piece of editing into a kind of diptych, despite differences of subject and time between the two sequences. There is, however, a difference in the status of the two images we see: the murder of the Mexican does not possess the same enigmatic quality as images of the ranch, where it is impossible to say whether they are dreamed, anticipated or simply mental, since time could have passed and the ranch have been built without any of the scenes shown in dissolves ever really having taken place. This undecidability underscores a characteristic peculiar to the images which feature parallels. Consequently shots of the herd are overlaid with a violence which is linked partly to the fields' visible tumult and partly to the violence revealed, at the end of this montage, by the proliferation of tombs behind the three men. Similarly, the murder of the Mexican is one of a spate of deaths which is signalled as much by an increase in the number of cattle as by the number of tombs. The final piece of this puzzle, then, which is concealed in the editing process adopted here, slots into place.

Water

In this film, violence is inscribed by means of liquids or related metaphors; and there are also other films by Hawks where Evil is linked to liquids. Two contrasting films may serve as examples: in a dramatic world such as that of *Tiger Shark* (1931) a vertical cross-section is employed to show ocean waters teeming with sharks, while in the more comic register of *Monkey Business* (1952), the potion prepared by Cary Grant's scientist wreaks its havoc through its transmission in drinking water.

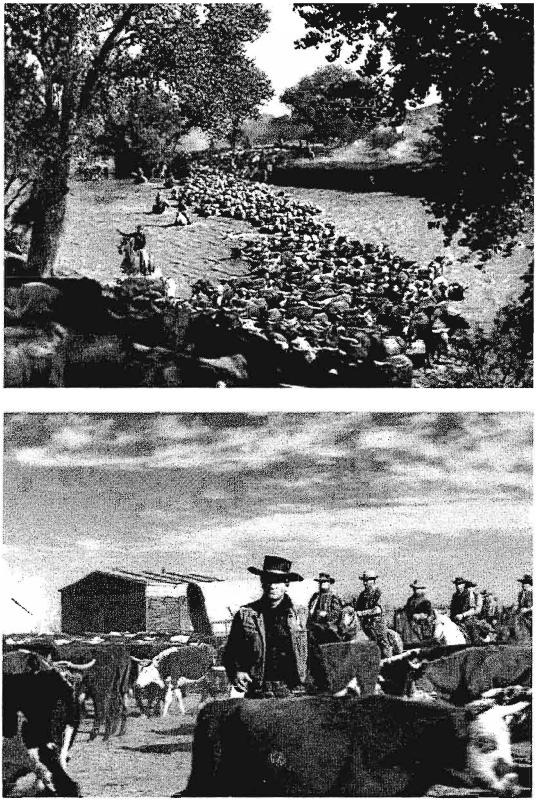
Swimming in the waters of the Red River, it seems, provokes an outbreak of violence, hatred and killing. The unique position which the Red River occupies is due to the fact that its proximity engenders violence. One might go as far as to say that its very mention, during the drawing of the ranch brand, is sufficient to generate the episode where the Mexican is murdered. In Hawks' films the river is not a place of purification. In *Rio Bravo*, the sheriff stepping over a trickle of water coincides with the arrival of Stumpy and the discovery of the dynamite. By way of comparison one need only consider the part played by water in *The River of No Return* or even in John Ford's films where the words of

The parallel between the murder of the Mexican and the evocation of the ranch



the hymn 'Shall We Gather at the River' consecrate the moment where the community gathers together in peace.

By its appearance and shape, the herd evokes the flow of running water, especially because it is generally presented as a more or less undulating column, squeezed between natural obstacles or flanked by cowboys. While the images of the future ranch and of the herd succeed one another in a series of dissolves, Dunson's voice-over speaks about good meat, good red beef, as nourishing as the river water irrigating the pastures. The metaphor of the herd, associated with the river's waters, resurfaces in the final sequence where he confronts Matt. Dunson literally plunges into the midst of the herd which he wades through in huge



Wading through the water and the herd

strides. At this moment he seems to merge once more with the founding gesture of swimming in the Red River (which explains why he dismounts his horse). Even his attitude suggests this as his first act is to fell Cherry Valence without even breaking his stride.

The idea of the river, then, is subject to a number of modulations. Dimitri Tiomkin's musical orchestration of the Red River makes one contribution through its broad, unfurling sheets of sound. Similarly the schematic figure provided by the drawing of two lines corresponds to the banks of a river, which the voice of Dunson identifies as the Red River, and forms an ideogrammatic representation of it which is applied to the animals and the journey with the herd.

The last shot in the film is made up of the new drawing of this brand. The letter M stands opposite the capital D. A surname and a first name; D for Dunson, M for Matthew. One loses his first name, the other gains a surname. Thus a certain symmetry is constituted by this new exchange. The symmetry also reminds us that the director's own name contains a repeated initial (H.H.), while the name 'Red River' is based on the repetition of the letter R.

By virtue of its position at the end, the new drawing resonates with the title of the film and reinforces all the parallels which have been drawn between the ranch brand and the Red River. The entire film, framed by its title on the one hand and the finished drawing of the ranch brand on the other, flows in the manner of the turbulent rapids which form the story's subject matter. By refusing an armed duel in favour of a fistfight, Matt arrests the process of death which is then made ridiculous by the intervention of a woman brandishing a revolver. The addition of the letter M serves to protect the banks of the Red River and stem the flow of blood while also completing the drawing.

The figure of which the ranch ideogram is an expression is made up of different elements, semantic as well as plastic by nature. The network formed by these motifs is there to be read in visible form (the presence of water) or secretly inscribed in the transformation of objects (the river, the bracelet) or themes (cattle branding). The elements of this figure are scattered within the film but come together in the ranch brand. Matt's initial completes the symbolic mark, the brand, which becomes a sort of emblem of the film's inherent genealogy (where a son finds an adoptive father). The ranch brands can be read, rather like heraldic symbols, in terms of coded formulations. But however visible it may be, this little

figure (small because of its function as a cattle brand) is not easily decipherable. It lies somewhere between the hieroglyph and the ideogram. Hawks was also acutely aware of this, making it into a sign of recognition, a nod, if not more, from himself to John Wayne. What else could be the meaning of the belt, whose silver buckle bears the 'Red River D' figure and which was given to Wayne by Hawks during the filming? Worn by Hawks, as several photos from the shoot attest, the belt was sported by the actor in the last three Westerns, thus forming a secret connection linking *Red River* with *Rio Bravo*, *El Dorado* and *Rio Lobo*.

Wayne wearing Hawks' belt in *Rio Bravo*

The whole film is about the problem of inscribing the final letter as a mark of filiation; how to merit this act and, at the same time, how to renounce it, for something is always lost in accomplishment. Gaining an adoptive son, losing one's first name or gaining a surname is scarcely different, in Hawks' world, from winning or losing a set of false teeth. And during this time it is the process of exchange which dominates, to create what Pierre Legendre would call 'the inestimable object of transmission'.

5

HAWKS' GENIUS

Howard Hawks' *œuvre* is often taken as an example of cinema at its most classical. And yet the various elements which an analysis of his films reveals sit uncomfortably with the standard definition of 'classicism', or with any notion of what the Western was generally held to be in 1948. Indeed what such an analysis brings out is a configuration of great originality. In a text which has become a classic of literary criticism in its own right, Jacques Rivette made 'evidence' Hawks' stamp of genius. This term struck a chord and has been retained. Confusing because of the divergence it embodies between its usual meaning (clarity, transparence) and its specific meaning as used by Rivette, the concept of 'evidence' is in fact nothing if not opaque.

Jean-Louis Comolli, in 1964, found himself somewhat amazed because

> to look at his films, one is forced to ask oneself what sort of 'classicism' might be at work here and whether the notion of 'evidence' does not need to be understood as something completely different from simplicity and immediacy ... and whether we do not need quite simply to reconsider ... our whole system of references, our nice little ready-made ideas about the 'classical', about the wisdom of the great Americans, about our adopted 'heroes', about that whole superstructure of myths which has contributed not inconsiderably to our love affair with American cinema.[72]

Gérard Legrand, in his 1977 article entitled 'Petit discours de la méthode de H.H.',[73] grasped fully that, when he spoke about 'classicism', Rivette was referring to the 17th century in France. In his preface to the French edition of Joseph McBride's book,[74] Rohmer states: 'It is severe disservice to Hawks to make him a classical filmmaker.' Henri Langlois, for his part, appeals to constructivism and abstraction in order to establish Hawks' modernity.[75] Thus 'evidence' could refer to a network of lines, a formal abstraction. In this perspective how can one avoid thinking of the ideogram which is the ranch brand drawn by Tom Dunson? This serves to hold the transparence of classical cinema at arm's length.

The notion of evidence contains several meanings. It can be understood in terms of the claim that cinematic representation is unmediated except by vision. 'The first and foremost mystery of the cinema is contained in this statement of the obvious. The surprising thing is that it does not surprise us.'[76] This claim led to a conception, developed by André Bazin and the editors of the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which Serge Daney recalls in these terms: 'Writing for the *Cahiers* meant inheriting, unwittingly or not, an *idée fixe* of Bazin's, one which was very hard to shake off, namely that cinema is a view of the world. Thus Bazin said that "editing is forbidden", while Rossellini added "Things are there, why manipulate them?"'[77]

To which one could also add: '"Evidence" is not just whatever happens to be obvious. Evidence is that which sets the right distance or faced with which this distance seems right.'[78]

Looking

On several occasions in *Red River* the young Matt undergoes the experience of acquiring knowledge instantaneously purely by seeing a given object or setting. This conjunction of perception and knowledge suggests a phenomenological interpretation and it is probable that, in the 1950s, this is what Rivette had in mind when proposing the concept of evidence. The myth of knowledge as a kind of mirror – which is obviously connected with the myth of cinema as unmediated contact with the world – is reinforced in the film by the importance which the look itself is accorded at such moments.

At the beginning of the film there are two short scenes which are based on the same visual principle. In order to disarm Matt, Dunson distracts his gaze with a little trick that quickly defuses the threat posed by the young boy. At the end of the altercation with the Mexicans, Tom is the first to shoot. When questioned about it by Matt, he explains that he was able to gauge his adversary's intentions and anticipate his movements by watching his eyes. Certainly, this detail is one of a catalogue of such situations that are part and parcel of the genre. Westerns often stage the scene where a veteran, who is still an excellent shot, teaches a youngster how to beat a rival in a duel through the superior speed to be gained by reading their eyes. The gesture can be also treated parodically as Sergio Sollima does in *Faccia a faccia* (*Face to Face*, 1967) through an abusive repetition of the process in an Italian Western which itself parodies the genre.

Red River contains a tale of apprenticeship in which a young boy proves that 'the exercise has been worthwhile' and anticipates the lesson of the young hero in *Moonfleet* (Fritz Lang, 1955). Matt experiences this on two occasions near the beginning of the film. After the incident with the Mexican, when Dunson has explained his technique of looking, he announces solemnly 'I'll learn'. Already at the first meeting, between Dunson and Groot on the one hand and the boy still overwhelmed by the massacre of the pioneers' convoy on the other, the play of gazes which allows the adult to disarm Matt ends in a short lesson. The operation concludes with a tacit act of adoption to which Groot acquiesces with a nod.

The final trilogy of *Rio Bravo*, *El Dorado*, *Rio Lobo*, despite the many differences from the characters in *Red River*, does conserve an element of child-like discovery of an untouched world. Candour, spontaneous yet durable friendship and brotherliness are all presented as transcending the violence of events. Relationships are still based on the three ages of man even if there are in fact four characters. Wounds and crutches multiply and people writhe in pain on the ground, but all these variations just seem to reformulate the riddle which the Sphinx poses Oedipus: what is a man and how does he come to learn truth on the path of life? This is what constitutes the enigmatic nature of the characters played by Wayne.

There is a kinship between the subject matter of Hawks' film and that of Fritz Lang. *Moonfleet* tells the story of a man who is adopted as a father against his wishes. Little by little Jeremy Fox gives in to young John's touching show of trust; Lang's story could in fact pass for a tale of initiation. The expression 'the exercise has been worthwhile' passes back and forth between the two characters and transforms their existence into a methodical and entertaining learning process which depends on a coded text and is eventually transmitted by a mysterious letter. This Y (first on the ring and in the text on the pendant, then on the bricks of the well) forms the secret code of a passage towards filiation that is set up between child and adult.

In Lang's films the fact of showing an effect without first knowing the cause is part of a principle of looking. From the gloom of the crypt where he has fallen, little John perceives the warning signs announcing the arrival of smugglers and in a backwards sequence the last to appear is Jeremy Fox himself, whom John then recognises to be their leader. This

kind of learning process seems to coincide with the story's strategy which also inverts the logical order of filiation, since the son creates the father by adopting him. It is the situation, dominated by the power of the gaze, which creates this particular kind of filiation. Hawks had already employed a similar strategy, while at the same time suggesting that the established filiation was little more than a pure product of chance. In *Red River* this filiation does not follow on from a quest to establish the father's authenticity by blood-lines (which is what we suspect in *Moonfleet*). Instead it is decreed according to a rule of affinity which is simply expressed by an adhesion through looking. Dunson is a kind of 'solar' father who is taken apart, or dislocated, before disappearing only to return reassembled. Nevertheless the possibility of Jeremy Fox returning always remains open for little John, just like the gate which closes the film.

In Hawks' world the evidence associated with looking finds its facetious counterpart in the comedies and notably in one of Cary Grant's gags, namely the 'little backwards movement to see better' which is highlighted by Luc Moullet's study.[79] This 'long-sighted gaze' can be inverted to give its exact opposite, a short-sighted gaze which gives a forward movement as excessive and inappropriate as the preceding one. The gaze out of step with a situation and the evidence of looking both create their own distance, but a certain distance from the world is already there. A film such as *Red River*, with its large spaces linked together as though imprinted in the graphic prism of the ranch brand, demands this double optical adjustment.

Seduction

The notion of evidence is matched by another difficulty which does nothing to simplify the essay-writer's task. How should we approach a work such as this? Hawks' cinema is not easy to analyse and the film-maker's own comments can be misleading. He makes no hesitation in telling Joseph McBride this, for instance: 'I try to tell my story as simply as possible, with the camera at eye level.'[80] But if this eye level perspective pans back for our amusement, his cinema cannot be as simple as he claims. Furthermore when reading his interviews we 'find the reticent tone of Faulkner's answers to journalists and Hemingway's comments on art'.[81] Such an attitude counts for a great deal in Hawks' opacity, which is reinforced by the glamorous quality of the seduction his works exert.

Red River is indeed a seductive film and the pleasure we experience is surprising, but none of the reasons one can think of leave us any the wiser as to the nature of this emotion. When Luchino Visconti inserted an extract of the film in *Bellissima* (1951), he chose to show the crossing of the river. The animals, men and water go to make up a marvellous scene in front of which the heroine, Maddalena (Anna Magnani), a connoisseur of American cinema, exclaims 'how beautiful!', thus indirectly accomplishing the Italian film-maker's tribute. This moment has its antithesis in the deliberately ridiculous scene by the Tiber. Despite the presence of the river and the heat, one is struck by the prosaic, mediocre nature of the décor in the scene where the young woman experiences her little moment of amorous seduction which goes wrong. She leaves shaking the sand from her dress as though emerging from a dream. The dazzling images from the previous night's Western remain in the background in this scene by Visconti. But here he shows their reverse, while at the same time revealing a hidden affinity for the illusory charms of a Renoir-esque day in the country. Visconti's reading is, perhaps, an enlightening one.

One of the characteristic features of a Western by Hawks is its tendency to remain detached and to suggest, over and above the profusion of sensations, a certain deployment of the *mise en scène*. As a result, the representation of the hard life of the cowboys, of their toil and sweat, can equally well form a destructive dramatic whole or a veritable enchantment of energy, light and freshness. The film's secret really lies in this distancing, or perversion, and in the Hawksian humour which is present in these beautiful images as well as in the final laughter. The choices made by Hawks, which are governed by the need to amuse his public (the word 'fun' is without doubt the one which recurs the most frequently in his interviews with McBride, together with his comments about his duty not to bore the public) thus come close to the guiding classical rule of a writer like Molière, whose sole concern was to please ...

NOTES

1 Maurice Shérer, 'Les Maîtres de l'aventure', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 29, December 1953, p. 45.
2 André Bazin, 'Comment peut-on être hitchcocko-hawksien?', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 44, February 1955, p. 18.
3 André Bazin, 'De la politique des auteurs', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 70, April 1957, p. 10.
4 André Bazin, 'Evolution du western', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, December 1955; reprinted in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?*, vol. 3, in the series 7ème Art (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1961), p. 152. For Bazin's classifications, refer to this article.
5 Robert Sklar, 'Empire to the West: *Red River*', *Cineaste*, Autumn 1978, reprinted in Jim Hillier and Peter Wollen (eds), *Howard Hawks American Artist* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996), p. 153.
6 Douglas Pye, 'Criticism and the Western', in Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (eds), *The Movie Book of the Western* (London: Studio Vista, 1996), p. 19.
7 Sklar, 'Empire to the West', p. 152.
8 Hawks felt that Hughes had spoiled the final scene and decided to show him how it should have been done by reusing it in *Red River*. Hughes was furious and threatened a law-suit; he wanted the last scene, and the repeated line 'Draw your gun', removed. These demands drew amused responses from several directors including Frank Capra who sent the following telegram to Hawks: 'I own the rights to say "I love you".' In the end twenty-four seconds had to be cut from the fight scene. These details are related in an interview with Joseph McBride in *Hawks on Hawks* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1996), p. 52.
9 Ibid., p. 137.
10 'Entretien avec Howard Hawks', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 192, July–August 1967, p. 17.
11 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 138.
12 Charles Schnee (1916–63) provided the screenplays for several well-known films, notably *They Live By Night* (1949), *The Furies* (1950), *Westward the Women* (1951), *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) and *Two Weeks in Another Town* (1962). From 1953 he became a producer at Metro.
13 Borden Chase (1900–71) is known for his collaborations with Anthony Mann; he is also the author of the screenplays for *Vera Cruz* (1954), *Man Without a Star* (1955) and *Backlash* (1956).
14 Jim Hitt, *The American West from Fiction (1823–1976) to Film (1906–1986)* (Jefferson, NC and London: McFarland, 1990), p. 70.
15 The closing statement of Jim Hitt's study, ibid., p. 72.
16 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, pp. 149–50.
17 Michel Pérez, 'Howard Hawks et le western', *Présence du Cinéma*, nos 2–3, 1959, p. 44.
18 See the chapter 'Culture and History', in Edward Buscombe (ed.), *The BFI Companion to the Western* (London: André Deutsch/BFI Publishing, 1988).
19 Andy Adams (1859–1935) is a cowboy novelist, who was born in Indiana and died in Colorado Springs. *The Log of a Cowboy*, his best-known work, was first published in 1903.
20 Jacques Rivette, 'Génie de Howard Hawks', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 23, May 1953, pp. 16–24.
21 J. Frank Dobie (1888–1964) was a specialist in Texan folklore about which he wrote several works.
22 Jean-Louis Rieupeyrout, *Histoire du Far West* (Paris: Tchou Editeur, 1967), p. 520.
23 Andy Adams, *The Log of a Cowboy* (London: Corgi/Transworld Publishers, 1962), p. 85.
24 David Lavender, *The American West* (London: Penguin, 1969), p. 92.
25 Alan Lomax, *The Folk Song of North America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1960).
26 Walter Prescott Webb, *The Great Plains* (1931; New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1959), pp. 217–18.
27 Joseph G. McCoy, *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade of the West and the Southwest* (1874), republished in Ralph B. Biber (ed.), *The Southwest Historical Series*, no. 7, 1940.
28 Rieupeyrout, *Histoire du Far West*, p. 529.
29 Sklar, 'Empire to the West', p. 154.
30 Rieupeyrout, *Histoire du Far West*, pp. 528–9.
31 A term adopted by Jean-Louis Leutrat in *Le Western* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1973), p. 181 ff.
32 Magazine illustrators also have their place here: A.R. Waud in *Harper's Weekly* (*A Drove*

of Texas Cattle Crossing a Stream, 1867) or L.W. McDonald in *Leslie* (*Thunderstorm near Kerrville, Texas*, 1881).
33 See Richard Corliss, 'Borden Chase, Howard Hawks and *Red River*', in Hillier and Wollen (eds), *Howard Hawks American Artist*, pp. 185–9.
34 Deborah Thomas, 'John Wayne's Body', in Cameron and Pye (eds), *The Movie Book of the Western*, p. 75.
35 In an essay devoted to American literature, Pierre-Yves Pétillon opens up 'a cavalier perspective on a century and a half of fictions' where 'writing America would be mapping, marking out, tracing ...': *La grande route* (Paris: Seuil, 1979).
36 See Edward Buscombe, *Stagecoach* (London: BFI Film Classics, 1992), pp. 10–12.
37 Luc Moullet, *Politique des acteurs,* Coll. Essais (Paris: Editions Cahiers du Cinéma, 1993), p. 13.
38 Cameron and Pye (eds), *The Movie Book of the Western*, p. 20.
39 Speaking of Wayne's roles, Deborah Thomas notes: 'many of these films pose him as an enigma – 'What makes a man to wander? (*The Searchers*), Who was Tom Doniphon? (*The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*), What kind of man is he, mother? (*Rio Grande*)', in 'John Wayne's Body', p. 80.
40 Ibid., p. 79.
41 Moullet, *Politique des acteurs*, p. 52.
42 Jon Tuska, *The Filming of the West* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), p. 509.
43 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 133.
44 Ibid., p. 134.
45 Alexandre Mimouni, 'Avec ou sans dentier, A propos de Walter Brennan', *Limelight* (Strasbourg) no. 41, September 1995, p. 25.
46 Serge Daney, 'John Ford for ever', in *Devant la recrudescence des vols de sacs à main* ... (Lyon: Aléas Editeurs, 1991), p.44.
47 Moullet, *Politique des acteurs*, p. 53.
48 Hawks' film *Sergeant York* dates from 1941; Ford didn't wait until *Rio Grande* (1950) to use the name York – it had already appeared in *Fort Apache* (1948).
49 Moullet, *Politique des acteurs*, pp. 53–4.
50 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 1.
51 Gérard Legrand, 'Petit discours de la méthode de H.H.', *Positif* nos 195–6, August 1977, p. 15.
52 Michel Delahaye, 'Hawks for ever!', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 180, July 1966, p. 23.
53 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 30.
54 Nor even by means of flashback, since Hawks refused to make use of this narrative procedure.
55 Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction à une vraie histoire du cinéma* (Paris: Editions Albatros, 1980), p. 110.
56 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 162.
57 Ibid.
58 Jean-Louis Comolli. 'L'envers de l'Eden', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 192, July–August 1967, p. 22.
59 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 152.
60 Henri Agel, '*Rio Bravo* ou le sublime du western', *Romance Américaine* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1963), p. 112.
61 Speaking about *Wee Willie Winkie* (1937) Ford makes this comment: 'One day it was pretty cloudy – it had been raining – but the clouds were so nice, and they had that occasional streak of light. Ordinarily, we would have knocked off for the day, but I had a great cameraman, Artie Miller, and I said "We've got to do something with the weather, with these clouds". I said "We've got everybody here – let's bury Victor!"', in Peter Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, Movie Paperbacks (London: Studio Vista, 1968), pp. 67–8.
62 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 136.
63 Furthermore, in this film of Ford's, the motif of the scar (a Hawksian motif *par excellence*) is subject to a particular development, as Jean-Louis Leutrat has shown in *La Prisonnière du désert. Une tapisserie navajo*, in the 'Un sur Un' series (Paris: Adam Biro, 1991).
64 This is the expression which Hawks uses ('Entretien avec Howard Hawks par Jacques Becker, Jacques Rivette et François Truffaut', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 56, February 1956, pp. 4–17).
65 Bogdanovich, *John Ford*, p. 46.
66 Patrice Rollet, 'La ligne d'ombre', *Cahiers du Cinéma,* John Ford special edition (Paris: Editions de l'Etoile/ Cahiers du Cinéma, 1990), p. 86.

67 At the beginning of *Hamlet* there is a movement from the expression 'russet mantle' (I. 1) to that of 'inky cloak' (I. 2). This play of red and black is important in *Red River*.
68 Serge Daney, 'Vieillesse du même', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 230, reprinted in *La Rampe* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Gallimard, 1983), p. 29.
69 Jean-Claude Biette, *Poétique des auteurs* (Paris: Cahiers du Cinéma/Editions de l'Etoile, 1988), pp. 126–7. He opposes Hitchcock and Hawks on the one hand with Lang, for example, who is on the side of the world and addresses a spectator as a human being who observes the spectacle, but shares the same life-space and time as the director, both of them experiencing the same reality.
70 Sklar, 'Empire to the West', p. 154.
71 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 94.
72 Jean-Louis Comolli, 'H.H, ou l'ironique', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 160, November 1964, p. 149.
73 Legrand, 'Petit discours de la méthode de H.H.'.
74 A text which had first appeared in 1978 in the journal *Cinéma*, no. 231.
75 Henri Langlois, 'Hawks, homme moderne', *Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 139, January 1963.
76 Edgar Morin, *Le Cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire. Essai d'anthropologie*, Bibliothèque Méditations (Paris: Editions Gonthier, 1958), p. 7.
77 Daney, *La Rampe*, pp. 16–17.
78 Jean-Luc Nancy, 'De l'évidence. *Et la vie continue* d'Abbas Kiarostami', *Cinémathèque* no. 8, Autumn 1995, p. 56.
79 Moullet, *Politique des acteurs*, pp. 96–7.
80 McBride, *Hawks on Hawks*, p. 93.
81 Pérez, 'Howard Hawks et le western', p. 46.

CREDITS

Red River

USA
1947 (© on-screen)
World Premiere
26 August 1948
US Release
17 September 1948
Distributor
United Artists Corp.
British Release
17 January 1949
©Monterey Productions

Production Company
Howard Hawks presents
Executive Producer
Charles K. Feldman
Producer
Howard Hawks
Production Manager
Norman Cook
Director
Howard Hawks
Co-director
Arthur Rosson
Assistant Director
William McGarry
Script Supervisor
Bobbie Sierks
Screenplay
Borden Chase, Charles Schnee
Based on the serial novel *The Chisholm Trail* by Borden Chase in *The Saturday Evening Post*
Photography
Russell Harlan
Grip
Thomas Thompson
Special Photographic Effects
Allan Thompson
Special Effects
Donald Steward
Film Editor
Christian Nyby
Assistant Editor
Carl Lerner

Art Director
John Datu Arensma
Wardrobe
Jack Miller
Make-up
Lee Greenway
Music/Music Conductor
Dimitri Tiomkin
Soundtrack
'Settle Down' by Dimitri Tiomkin
Music Recorder
Vinton Vernon
Sound
Richard DeWeese
Stuntman
Richard Farnsworth

John Wayne
Thomas 'Tom' Dunson
Montgomery Clift
Matthew 'Matt' Garth
Joanne Dru
Tess Millay
Walter Brennan
Nadine Groot
Colleen Gray
Fen, Tom's fiancée
Harry Carey Sr
Melville
John Ireland
Cherry Valence
Noah Beery Jr
Buster McGee
Harry Carey Jr
Dan Latimer
Chief Yowlatchie
Quo
Paul Fix
Teeler Yacey
Hank Worden
Simms
Mickey Kuhn
Matt as a boy
Ray Hyke
Walt Jergens
Hal Talliaferro
Old Leather

[uncredited]
Pierce Lyden
wagon train scout
Lane Chandler
Colonel
Joe Dominguez
Mexican guard
Davison Clark
Mr Meeker
Ivan Parry
Bunk Kenneally
Dan White
Laredo
Glenn Strange
Naylor
Tom Tyler
quitting wrangler
Paul Fierro
Fernandez
William Self
Sutter, wounded wrangler
Shelley Winters
girl at wagon train dance
Lee Phelps
George Lloyd
gamblers at wagon train
John Merton

11,406 feet
127 minutes (a restored 'Director's Cut' in 1987 ran to 133 minutes)

Black-and-white

Credits compiled by Markku Salmi, BFI Filmographic Unit

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